

"Oh I'm so excited, James. Just think our darling children our going through their Ritual soon, and just look at all these articles thinking that they might be the one. It will be so exciting if it's true". Lily said. James laughed from behind his newspaper.

"Lily, Chris is the Boy Who Lived and Glory is the first potter girl in generations, the one to break the Potter family curse, of course the papers are going to be talking about them".

A boy frowned from his vantage point in the corner. He was used to been ignored, after all he wasn't expected to amount to much. He wasn't abused but it was made clear that he was not as special as his two siblings. He was instead treated much like a servant, don't speak unless spoken to, and follow orders without question, blaah blaah blaah. Of course that was only in private, in public he was expected to act like the perfect heir to the Potter name, albeit one who would abdicate his position at his coming of age.

"Harry don't frown it's unbecoming." Lily had noticed his look. That was another thing, the only times they seemed to notice him was when it was time to chastise him.

"Yes ma'am." he spoke quietly, his voice unused. Lily had already gone back to talking with James.

"Ma'am, Sir, I've received a correspondence from the Delacour family asking if I would like to holiday with them after the Ritual Day, both Lady Fleur and Lady Gabrielle will be going through their rituals so they will be at gringotts at the same time as us".

Harry had become great friends with Fleur Delacour whilst attending Beauxbaton, despite their two year age gap. Fleur had just begun her veela puberty and as such found it difficult to make friends. Harry as the outcast brother of the boy who lived was going through the same difficulties. The two of them had also through Harry made friends with the star of Durmstrang Viktor Krum. Harry an excellent quidditch player who had on his first year gained the position of reserve seeker for the Beauxbaton inter-school team. This had allowed him to play several matches, one of which was against the Durmstrang team. In an excellent match, Harry by mere inches had lost out on catching the snitch, but the good sportsmanship and excellent competition had meant that Krum felt compelled to seek

the young Potter out, and the three had been near inseparable ever since.

Beauxbaton and Durmstrang had a very close relationship and had many inter-school competitions as well as shared classes. Beauxbaton's was renowned for its etiquette, healing and charms, whilst Durmstrang was known for its defence, dark arts and duelling. All three of them competed often in duelling, and other weapons, as well as equine competitions. All three did quite well although Fleur was the undisputed equine champion. Viktor often joked that it was her veela charm that allowed her such a way with horses; Harry thought Viktor was jealous because despite his skill on a broomstick, he was utterly hopeless with horses. Harry on the other hand was such a powerful wizard that he excelled at all the magical arts especially duelling. He frequently came out top as the magic only duelling champion, and often made it to the finals in mixed weapon duelling.

Despite all this Harry had absolutely no confidence in his own abilities, both Fleur and Krum thought it was because of the utter disregard that most British wizards had for him, especially his own family. This was disregarding the fact that within mainland Europe Harry had become quite well known for his skills. At 17 both Fleur and Krum would be attending their last years at school, and Harry was dreading attending school without them the following year.

"The Delacours, that's that part Veela family isn't it." Lily wrinkled her nose in disgust.

"Yes ma'am."

"Lily, the Delacours are a very powerful family it would not be advisable to scorn their invitation." James the ever politically aware placated his wife.

"He should take Chris with him, after all what would people say if the Boy Who Lived dated a veela".

"Fleur's dating Viktor Krum ma'am." Harry interrupted. It hadn't been much of a shock to Harry at least when Fleur and Viktor had started dating at the end of the year.

"Oh never mind then, you may go, of course it would not do if we stopped you. Now go and tell Glory and Chris that dinner is ready and then start serving".

"Yes ma'am".

"And then he swooped in and got the snitch right in front of Malfoys' nose. You should have seen the look on his face!" Chris guffawed spraying bits of chicken out of his mouth, as he spoke. Harry inwardly frowned in disgust but didn't say anything. It wasn't his place.

"Are you trying out for the quidditch team this year Chris? I say it's a crime that that Wood boy didn't let you on before." James said.

Chris scowled and stabbed a piece of chicken with his fork "yeah, well Woods always been out to get me, he's jealous of my fame and skill, he's afraid I'd have shown him up in front of the scouts. I hear that he's playing for Puddlemore now. That teams really going down if they let a player like Wood on".

Harry thought inwardly that it wasn't Wood that was jealous. From what Harry had heard Chris had tried to bully his way onto the team with his fame, when Wood had called for a fair tryout and had found an older player with more skill, Chris had thrown a bit of a tantrum, and Wood had said that no one with such poor sportsmanship would be allowed on his team.

"Your right son, you shouldn't let such jealous nobodies be jealous of you. You're the Boy Who Lived and a much greater wizard then they'll ever be".

"Hey your right dad. Anyways I'm going over to Ernie's after dinner".

"your still friends with that puff. Good on you boy fraternising with those beneath you, well have fun".

Harry morosely began to clear up the dishes.

In a chateau in the south of France a stunning blonde lounged in the sun, enjoying her summer holiday and the chance to soak up some rays. It really was a beautiful day she thought, to bad neither Harry nor Viktor could be there. As she lay there a young child of clear resemblance came tearing out the house.

"Sister, Sister" she yelled.

Fleur sat up and looked at Gabrielle crossly. "Do not yell Gabrielle, it is not fitting." She scolded.

"Sorry." She said not in the least abashed. Fleur just sighed.

"Well, what is it that has you yelling like a banshee".

"A letter..." she paused. Fleur crossed her arms and rolled her eyes in exasperation.

"A letter from whom Gabby" Gabrielle giggled a little, and Fleur felt her patience wane and quickly grabbed the parchment out of Gabrielle's hand, noticing absently the already broken seal. She would lecture Gabrielle later on the importance of not reading other peoples private mail, or at the least not get caught doing it. The young girl gave an indignant "no fair!" which was quickly silenced with a look from her elder sister.

Fleur silently perused the letter, and as she reached the end she squealed in delight.

"Ooh! It is from Harry, he says he has permission to visit Italy with us. I must tell Mama and Papa immediately. Mama just loves Harry and Papa has been itching to duel with him ever since last years championship match. Poor Papa he still thinks he's good enough to duel..."

"And who says I'm not my dear" a clearly male voice interrupted.

"Papa" the two girls shouted simultaneously before Fleur jumped up to give him a hug and a kiss on each cheek.

"Papa, you're not supposed to be back from the conference for another day, did it end early"?

"No, however I felt that my presence was no longer required and so decided to come home and see my two lovely daughters while they are actually home for me to see. Now what's this I hear about my esteemed duelling skills"?

Marius Delacour was a career politician, and a man of the Old Blood. However in his youth he had fancied himself as a duellist and frequently participated in the European circuits, and whilst he was not the most successful man out there, he had not acquitted himself badly. In addition the contacts he had made during his tours had served him well to this very day. Indeed he had met his wife in one of the tours. A veela of Spanish origin she had been duelling against him in a match and had tried to use her veela powers against him to win the match. Far from working, Marius had overcome the veela charm and succeeded in beating her with a clever use of common charms. Maya Delacour or Sancha as she was known then, had resolved then and there that Marius was to be her husband and less than a year later the two had wed.

"Oh Papa! I was only joking. You must know by now that I hold you in the highest regard" Fleur said innocently.

"Mmm hmm" Marius did not look as if he believed her and instead brought out his wand and waved it about lazily, "well then you would not say no to a friendly duel now would you"?

In response Fleur also brought out her own wand and the two both walked back a respectable distance. Gabrielle wisely decided to watch from a safer distance.

"Rules?" Fleur asked whilst lazily twirling her wand between her fingers.

"The usual" he responded, which caused Fleur to grin widely. The usual in their family meant that weapons were permitted, and Fleur simply loved to fence.

"Stop right now" a voice yelled from the direction of the house, and both Delacours turned to watch as the matriarch of the family came towards them. They shot each other bemused looks.

"You will not duel in this garden; I will not have such a beautiful place torn up by your spells. If you simply must duel then do it

somewhere else. How about... I don't know... our duelling platform perhaps"?

Marius turned dark eyes towards his oldest daughter. "Shall we relocate then?" he questioned. Fleur simply grinned and taking his proffered arm, the two of them strolled away.

After a long afternoon of duelling which the two had decided to call a tie, the two sweaty and tired joined the rest of the family in the dining room for supper. To Fleurs' surprise and delight, her family were not the only people in the room.

"Viktor!" she exclaimed and ran to give him a big hug and a kiss, which he happily returned.

"Fleur, you're all sweaty" he commented when she pulled away.

"Prat" she said as she swatted him lightly, her grin never leaving her face. "What are you doing here; I thought you were in training for the European championships"?

"I am but I decided to come visit you for the night, I have to take a portkey out early tomorrow though to make it to practice on time. Not to mention the Ritual is soon, and my coach is not happy that I have to take time off for that..."

"Oh Viktor I'm so glad you came" Fleur interrupted him and gave him another kiss.

"Achem" a cough gently interrupted, and Fleur pulled away not in the least embarrassed.

"So young Viktor how is training going?" Marius questioned.

"Very well sir, though I apologise that I can't take time off to go on holiday with you and your family. Coach always works me harder in the holidays to make up for loss of practice time in the school year" Krum replied whilst spooning some soup into his mouth.

"That reminds me Papa".

"Yes Gabrielle"?

"Fleur got a letter from Harry today".

"Yes Papa, he accepts our invitation and says that he will have all his things with him, on the day of the ritual, so he will meet us at Gringotts." Fleur explained.

"You are both having your rituals at Gringotts?" Krum questioned.

"Yes, are you not"?

"No all Durmstrang students have theirs take place at Durmstrang, we have a powerful enough ritual room, and it makes other locations logistically easier to arrange, although we do have to invite an ICW representative to witness it".

"Oh that makes sense, I know that both Hogwarts and Beauxbaton students use Gringotts, but most French and English students have to make alternative arrangements. I just assumed that Durmstrang as part of the trinity had the same deal with Gringotts".

Fleur did not mention, but thought instead that as the three premiere schools of magic in the world, that the chances of the One coming from one of their schools was infinitely greater than any other school. That was why they used Gringotts as one of the reasons Gringotts was so well protected was because it lay on one of the Lay lines, hence it had the original room that was used for this ritual. The land that Gringotts lay on had been gifted to the goblins at the end of the last goblin rebellion as a way to prevent any future rebellions. It was such an important piece of land that it had worked, and the goblins and wizards had enjoyed profitable relationships ever since.

Although she did not say all this, Krum seemed to have guessed, and he smirked slightly at her.

"You're forgetting my dear, that Durmstrang students are primarily from Eastern Europe and so whilst a powerful group of wizards with a strong tradition of our own, we only have tentative links to the old aristocracy. It is unlikely that one of us will be revealed as the one".

Fleur snorted in an unladylike fashion, whilst her mother patiently responded. "You sell yourself short Viktor. You are no more unlikely than any muggleborn or indeed any of us. After all it has been over a thousand years since the Ritual was introduced and no one has

been revealed yet. The Ritual is more of a coming of age, or right of passage than anything else".

"True enough, however since we do the Ritual more out of tradition than anything else, then it is very traditional to carry on at Durmstrang like we have always done".

"A fair point Viktor" Marius interrupted his wife who had opened her mouth to continue the discussion. "Anyway since this will probably be the last time that we see you before you have your own ritual. That is, unless you drop in for another surprise visit" Viktor shook his head with a smile.

"Then I propose a toast, to a successful ritual for all three of you"

They all rose their glasses into the air and as one intoned "to a successful ritual".

They clinked their glasses together and drank their red filled liquid, an air of celebration permitting the air.

Later that night Fleur and Viktor sat up under the stars together for what would probably be the last time that summer and thought about the ritual that they would both be going through. They thought about what it would mean to them if the One was found and they thought about what would happen if they were the One. In the end they decided it didn't matter and they went to bed with dreams of magic far greater than themselves, and a warmth that they did not understand. The next day Fleur woke up by herself and knew that somehow after the Ritual everything would be different.



## The Morning of the Ritual

Harry woke up from his dreamlike sleep quite suddenly. This was quite normal for him, as he did not enjoy sleep in the way that most teenagers do. He did not have vivid nightmares that left him screaming and drenched in cold sweat. Indeed quite often he could not remember his dreams at all. This did not change though, the fact that he did not sleep easily. His flat mates at Beuxbatons: for they did not have dorms, but rather shared a flat in mixed groups of 5-10 people (Harry shared with 7!): had noticed this trait about him, and had tried multiple ways of fixing it. They did not like been woken up in the middle of the night, by him wondering around their small kitchen area. Fleur and Krum had also found out, and tried to psycho-analyse him, in the hopes of getting to the root of the problem. Fleur believed that it was a result of his unloved childhood, that his dreams acted as an outlet for all the negative experiences he had, and that was why he had trouble sleeping. Krum just thought he needed to get laid!

Regardless of all those reasons Harry was usually awake before most of his family. This was advantageous in two respects. It allowed him to sneak out and fly on his brothers top of the line Firebolt (Harry used school supplied brooms as did all Beauxbaton and Durmstrang students during quidditch matches); it also allowed him time to make his family their breakfast. He did not make the breakfast as some might think because his family made him in an effort to demean him. No the reasons were much simpler. As a child Harry in his innocence had hoped that if he did things for his parents, then they would love him as much as they loved Chris and Glory. In a fit of inspiration he had begun to do odd jobs around the house, simple things like making the breakfast or emptying the bins. He didn't need to do more than that as the Potters been a wealthy family did have house elves. He had carried on doing these jobs for months, the house elves learning that they did not have to do those jobs because 'young master harry' did them. However it soon became apparent that both Lily and James had not noticed his efforts, nor did they care to. Nevertheless he carried on in a vain hope until it both became routine and habit, a habit that even living away from home for most of the year, he could not break.

Because of all this, it came as a shock to Harry when he woke up at his normal time, not to a silent house with only the faint fluttering of curtains to be heard, but rather to the noise of extreme chaos.

"MUM WHERE'S MY DRESS ROBES" Glory screamed from two doors away.

"YOU DON'T NEED THEM SWEETIE, YOU'LL BE WEARING WHITE, RITUAL ROBES" Lily shouted back from the bedroom she shared with dreams.

There was the sound of feet pounding as Chris came tearing down the corridor, in search of something or other. Harry buried his head in his pillow, but it was no use and he resolved to get dressed.

Harrys' room was nothing what you would expect when you looked at his home life. It was richly decorated in blues and greens, with fine woods and clear glass. Around the room were pictures of the Bulgarian National quidditch team (a gift from Krum), the Bigonville Bombers (Fleurs' team) and the Caerphilly Catapults (Harrys' own team). All of the pictures were moving and the players constantly either flew around recapping moves from their games, or smiled and waved, occasionally tackling each other. Krum of course had to be different and although in most pictures he would scowl (his signature look, Fleur would joke) in the ones that Harry had, he alternatively flipped him off or smiled in a frankly disturbing manner (disturbing only because it was so foreign on his face).

Also in his room were pictures from famous duelling tournaments. They were actually tutorial pictures and showed each duel before recapping step by step; going over how each spell was performed and accomplished, before giving alternative steps that the duellist could have taken. Harry loved these posters and had, before creating his own style, copied many of the techniques used by the professional duellists.

He also had numerous books, miscellaneous objects from friends, a variety of weapons that he had acquired over the years, that he frequently practiced with (although he wouldn't confess to being a master at any of them) and a huge number of photos of friends from Beauxbaton and Durmstrang. Noticeably absent from his room, was any photos of his family, or any gifts from his family. Mainly because he didn't really have that many, and those that he were given were for appearances only and thus had no real value, at least not to Harry.

Having finished getting dressed, Harry went downstairs to make breakfast.

A few hours later, everyone was finally ready and waiting to leave.

"Is everybody here, is everybody ready" Lily asked fussing over Glory's hair. To Lily's chagrin none of her children had inherited her hair. The potter hair, it seemed was a curse even to the females in the family. Glory usually spent hours in front of the mirror trying to tame it. Today she had spent twice as long and it showed. Even Harry who couldn't really care less admitted that it looked good. Chris had also made an effort it seemed, for his hair was sleeked back with so much hair gel, that it looked like the French boy Gerald's hair. Gerald who was in the year below Harry routinely used enough gel for the entire year, and went through so many jars, that the boys in his year had made a life size, animated pyramid out of the jars at the end of the year.

Harry's hair was its usual mess.

"Yes Lily we're all here and we are all ready" James sighed, exasperated.

"Then I think we should once again go over the rules for this outing" Lily said straightening out.

"But muuum" Chris whined "we've been over this hundreds of times before".

"Yes I know sweetie, but it's important we don't forget. Now, what do we do if we are attacked"?

"Use our emergency portkey straight away. Do not stay and fight. If it doesn't work take cover in one of the shops. Do not stay and fight." Glory and Chris intoned the clearly rehearsed speech as one. Harry stayed silent, not really paying attention.

"If a reporter asks you a question you do not want to answer, or your not allowed to answer... and no Glory you can't answer questions about boyfriends, letting them wonder will increase your publicity, and anyway were still giving the impression that we are considering marriage contracts..."

just say 'no comment' if they persist signal one of the auror guards and they will remove the reporter"

"Yes mom" the two intoned again.

"Right then if were all set..." Lily said reaching for the portkey.

"Wait Lily, I want to say one thing to Glory and Chris before we go out in public" Lily nodded her acceptance, retracting her hand.

"You two today's a special day for you. A day you'll remember for the rest of your lives, and I want you to know that even if you aren't the one you're still incredibly special and both your mother and I love you very much and I..." He said, tears appearing in his eyes.

Harry was slowly getting more and more bored. James made a big speech which was very similar in content every time something happened. Like before they received their Hogwarts letters and James said that it didn't matter if they got in or not. Or right before they got their wands, or before they were sorted into their House. Every time he made nearly the exact same speech. How he would always love them, and was so proud of them etc. etc. etc. Harry guessed that it wouldn't be so bad if James would say something like that to him, just once. But he had given up on that hope a long time ago.

"Oh and Harry".

Harry looked up suddenly hopeful.

"As soon as you see the Delacours I would appreciate if you would join them. You don't need to tell us".

Harry's heart sank back into reality. With one more round of checking to see if everyone (bar Harry) looked presentable, they all grabbed onto the portkey and disappeared towards Diagon Alley.

## Diagon Alley

The five of them appeared in the crowded room of the Leaky Cauldron and were immediately swarmed by crowds of fans and reporters. Harry found himself being jostled and shoved and eventually pushed altogether outside the crowd, in the manic group's efforts to get close to the famous family. Chris gave his most charming smile, one that had him in the running for Witch Weekly's Most Charming Smile Award, only to have lost out to Gilderoy Lockhart and the famous Irish Seeker Aidan Lynch. Harry trailed behind the family as they moved; still swarmed by people, out into the Alley and towards Gringotts. The flash of photography was dizzying, but Harry was used to it.

"Chris, Chris are you looking forward to the Ritual"?

"Glory are you jealous of your brother..."?

"Mr. Potter are you proud of you're..."?

Harry shook his head at the unoriginality of the questions as the Potters fielded them. Couldn't the reporters for once ask something interesting, like... his thoughts were interrupted as they reached Gringotts, and he spotted a flash of golden hair. He looked back at his family, but they were focused on the reporters and cameras in front of them. With a sigh Harry made his way over to where he spotted his friend.

Half way over, Fleur, who had been looking around, spotted him and with a shout ran over and enveloped him in a hug.

"Harry how are you. You have not been eating enough. It is simply not good enough. We will fatten you up in Italy".

Harry smiled "Fleur, drop the accent. You've been able to speak English perfectly well since you were eight".

Fleur, who had also been smiling, broke out into a fit of laughter.

"I know, but it is funny, no"?

Harry just rolled his eyes, which Fleur responded to by hitting him on the shoulder. Harry pretended to be in pain.

"Harry, how are you" Marius asked as he too reached Harry, having followed at a more sedate pace.

"I'm very well sir. How are you"?

"Now Harry what have we told you about calling us Sir and Ma'am?" Maya asked.

"...err not to"?

There were a few moments of silence.

"It's a force of habit"!

"Well then" Marius clapped his hands resolutely "we'll just have to break you of that habit. Now Harry where's your Trunk"?

Harry patted his pocket, where his belongings were shrunken.

"Why don't you give them to me to look after, we don't want them to interfere with the ritual now do we"?

Harry agreed and past him the trunk, before passing into companionable silence.

It was about ten minutes before the Ritual was about to begin, and the alley around Gringotts was now swarmed with wizards and witches in white ritual robes. Harry and Fleur had at one point separated from Fleur's family, and had several moments chatting to various friends who they had spotted. They were now trying to make their way through the bustling crowd in order to claim a good spot to watch the Ritual from.

"It's disgraceful isn't it?" a feminine voice asked. Harry looked up shocked, realising that the question was been asked to him. The person speaking was a young girl, with frizzy, brown hair who was currently looking at Harry, an indignant expression on his face. Harry realised that she was waiting for a response.

"I'm sorry?" he asked.

"This whole Ritual... it's a disgrace".

Harry and Fleur exchanged confused looks.

"I'm afraid; I don't know what you mean"?

"The whole idea, that a teenager could feasibly replace a long standing, democratic body just because of some ritual. I mean how is that fair. It's an outdated and frankly a contemptible idea!" she bristled in anger.

Fleur looked amused at her outburst, but Harry was just confused.

"But magic... chooses only someone who is worthy. Surely that makes it Ok"?

"No, giving someone absolute power over a people is never 'OK'! Just because magic chooses them, doesn't make them any less human, or less prone to making mistakes. The people should have a say in their own governance, that's the only right thing." she tiraded.

Fleur chose this point to interrupt.

"You're forgetting, though that we are a split society".

It was now the girls turn to look confused.

"What do you mean by split"?

"We are a society, defined and shaped by magic, a magic split in half. There are those that our light and those that are dark. For the last few hundred years there has been an imbalance. The dark increasingly marginalised, whilst the light flourishes. A society as divided as ours needs a neutral party in order to guide and unite us. Otherwise the dark will disappear".

"But isn't that a good thing, after all the dark is evil isn't it"?

Harry looked shocked and affronted and vehemently denied those claims.

"No, never! The dark is as necessary as the light, though people are forgetting that fact. Think of the symbol of ying and yang, together it

is complete. If the dark disappears then the light will soon follow, and there will be no more magic left in the world".

"But isn't dark magic corruptive?" she questioned.

"Yes, but no more so than light. Any magic can be corruptive, after all though He-who-must-not-be-named was a Dark Lord, and one of the most terrible ever, Grindelwald before him was a Light Lord and just as terrible for it".

"Why have I never heard of this before then?" the girl demanded.

"Because like we said, the dark is marginalised and scapegoat to such an extent, especially in Britain, that people like to forget about the atrocities that the light commits. I mean, just look at werewolves. They are inflicted with a curse created by the dark. Chaos magics to be precise. Because of that they are prejudiced against to such an extent, that many try to hide what they are, and do not take safe protection like the wolfsbane potion. Instead they lock themselves up with silver and many die from this." Fleur explained.

"Or let's think of something closer to home. Slytherins at the age of 11 are branded as evil, straight away, just because of their house. They face bullying and harsh treatment all the way through school, and only few get past the stigma that the House creates. Let me ask you something can an 11 year old child be evil?" Harry asked.

Realisation seemed to be appearing on the girl's face.

"No" she breathed "No, they can't".

"And yet, because of the House's dark history, they are branded as just that".

The girl seemed to be mulling this over.

"You're right" she said simply, and that was that.

Suddenly she seemed to realise something.

"Oh how rude of me. I never introduced myself. I'm Hermione Granger, Gryffindor and you're Harry Potter, but I'm afraid I don't



know who you are?" Harry was frozen into silence, by the fact that someone in Britain actually remembered who he was.

"I'm Fleur Delacour... if you don't mind me asking, how did you know who Harry was"?

"Isn't it obvious? I mean, honestly, the lightning bolt scar and the messy hair is a bit of a give away. People always seem to forget that Chris was not the only child there that night, and wasn't the only one to receive a cursed scar".

Harry inwardly frowned; yes he like Chris had a cursed scar, which many suspected to be a result of the magical backlash of the killing curse. But because of this he had gained a dark gift that he had foolishly shown his parents as a child. That was the only time he could remember his parents showing him anything more than a passing thought. Lily had paled, and James had turned a horrible red colour, before shaking him and making him swear, never to tell anyone about his power. Harry had agreed scared, but the very next day it had been all over the papers and Harry had been forbidden supper that night. Thankfully the whole thing had blown over, due to the explanation of magical backlash causing him to gain one of Voldemorts' powers, and Harry had sunk once again into ignominy.

Fleur smiled warmly at Hermione, and it was clear that she had made a friend. She linked arms with her, and said.

"Well then Hermione, why don't you join us, to watch the opening ceremony of the Ritual"

She agreed, and together they all walked into Gringotts, and went towards an event that would change all of their lives.

## Gringotts Ritual Room

After finding a point where they could watch the proceedings from, the three teens waited for the hustle and bustle to die down, so that the proceedings could get underway. Across the room from where they stood, were the Potters, surrounded as normal by their fans. The fans in question looked exceedingly happy to be standing next to the famous four. Harry noticed as two goblins dressed in armour closed the great doors, and then stood to attention on either side, spears held aloft in salute. Slowly the noise in the room died down, until there was complete silence.

From a door in the side of the room emerged a group of people, amongst them were numerous officials including Minister Fudge and Albus Dumbledore. He was dressed in a deep purple wizarding robe, as opposed to his normal clashing fare, so it was clear that he was there in his capacity as Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot, and not the Headmaster of the most prestigious school in Britain. At the head of the group was a herald, a portly, old man who had held the prestigious position for the last forty years. The main body of the group went off to the side of the room, where a seated area had been cleared for them. Most of them were to serve as witnesses to the proceedings.

The herald however made his way to the centre of the room, where a platform had been erected just off the ritual circle. He cleared his throat theatrically before unrolling a long and ancient looking scroll. He perused it for a moment before looking up and announcing in a surprisingly clear voice.

"Let it be known that in the 1678th Year of Merlin, seven years have passed since the previous Ritual. Seven is the most powerful magical number and so we convene in the seventh month of the seventh year, as we have done for the last thousand years." He paused for dramatic effect.

"Let it also be known, that to date, no one person has shown themselves to be the One, since the tragic year 1423." At this announcement he bowed his head in respect, as did most of the people in the room.

Harry also bowed his head, for in the year 1423 someone had been revealed in the Ritual. Unfortunately during the process of the Ritual

a jealous and bitter rival had killed the man. The man in question had been childless, and without siblings, so there had been no heir. The assassin became the first man in history to receive the dementors kiss for his crimes.

After a respectful amount of silence the herald resumed his speaking.

"Let it be known, the most noble history of why we convene. His Majesty King Octavious IX died without a worthy heir, and so a search of all the magical lands was conducted to see who magic had chosen as his successor. Magic had found no man, woman, or child worthy and so the task of governance fell to His Majesties Ministries. Magic did not chose the Ministries either, so they are unworthy to rule Magic's' People. It is not what Magic wants and it is not supported by Magic and so it was ordained that when ever the magic was sufficient a search would be conducted until Magic's chosen was found".

Silence followed as everyone listened to the well known history.

"Let this year be the year that Magic's chosen is revealed". His voice shook as he said this, and although it was part of the rehearsed speech, it was clear that this at least he meant.

"Thus in the name of the Light and the Dark, let the Ritual begin".

There was a great fanfare and then out from the side door a group of people came. The adults of the group were dressed in rich robes of purple and gold, and each had a sword at their sides. The children in the group were all in ritual white. They marched in a steady line and came to a halt in front of the herald.

Harry watched in interest as the herald confronted them in the traditional way.

"Who are you to interrupt these proceedings?" he asked.

"We are the Monarchs Seneschals. His representatives to the light and dark, and his chief servants and protectors." They replied.

"Who are these children, dressed in white" he asked.

"They are to be tested and then presented".

"Then present, step forward Lord of Dark House Mendoz".

No one stepped forward.

"I will repeat. Step forward Lord of Dark House Mendoz." he commanded.

This time one of the adults stepped forward.

"Lord Herald, the Dark House Mendoz is died out and so there is no representative to present".

This was a well known and documented fact. The family had died three hundred years before. It was one of the major reasons for the imbalance of light and dark, although the imbalance had begun long before then.

The herald knew of the end of the line, but he had to ask for a representative to step forward in any case.

"Who are you, to inform me thus?" the herald inquired, although everyone in the room knew the answer.

"I am Lord Lucius of Dark House Malfoy, Chief of His Majesties Dark Seneschals."

"Do you have anyone to present Chief Malfoy"?

"My only son Draco Malfoy".

"Then step forward, young Draco".

Draco Malfoy stepped forward into the ritual circle, where he stood silently for a few moments. Nothing happened and he stepped out of it and faced the Herald.

"Do you Draco Malfoy accept your responsibilities as a Dark Seneschal of the Monarch and swear loyalty to him"?

"I do" his voice was loud and clear, although it shook the tiniest bit.

"Then kneel".

Malfoy knelt on the floor, with his head bowed, and the herald asked him to make his oath.

"I Draco Malfoy of the Dark House of Malfoy, son of Lucius Malfoy Chief of the Dark Seneschals and Narcissa nee Black Malfoy of The Most Noble and Ancient House of Black, do hereby swear loyalty to the monarch whomever he may be. By my life, blood and magic this Oath I make, and it will surpass all other oaths I make whether it be before or after this. This I do swear. So mote it be".

A flash of light and the oath was accepted. Seconds later a sword appeared at his side, and Lucius Malfoy noticing his acceptance into the Seneschals welcomed him to the fold with a kiss to the forehead.

Next it was the light Seneschals turn and Amos Diggory Chief of the Light Seneschals presented his son Cedric. The process followed the same vein and Cedric was accepted. The other Light Seneschal family was the Weasley's, which was where the famous family feud between the Malfoy's and the Weasley's came from. Five hundred years before the two patriarchs of the family had had a differing of opinion. Although both were loyal to the monarchy, they both believed in a different way of showing their loyalty. This had ended with a duel that had cost the life of the Weasley Patriarch, and the two families had not been friends since.

The eldest of the Weasley children had already had their Ritual and so it was the twins Fred and George who went up first. As they were magical twins they had to go up together. Not all twins are magical twins, as it is very rare, but Fred and George were. What it meant was that they were two halves of essentially the same person, although they were able to think independently of each other and have differences of opinion. They could share each others magic and had a telepathic connection. This meant though that any oath that one made, bound the other just as much, as magic could not recognise the difference between the two.

After the twins a young man, holding a cane and with a patch over his eye limped forward. With a jolt Harry realised that he was Ron Weasley, the Hero of Hogwarts. In his first year at school, Voldemort had made a bid to return by means of the Philosophers stone. Ron Weasley had uncovered the plot, but no one would believe him.

They believed that he was telling stories in order to get out of his brothers shadows. The teachers had punished him with a severe loss of house points, and that had cost him what few friends he had made. Alone, Ron had made his way down to the chamber where the stone was been kept and confronted Voldemort. He had been successful in that he had managed to cast out the spirit of Voldemort that had possessed his Defence teacher, but in the process he had to destroy an ancient, powerful artefact called the Mirror of Erised. The result of the mirrors destruction caused a magical backlash that destroyed the room, and lost Ron Weasley his eye, and movement in his leg.

After the event though Ron had become instantly famous and was regarded as one of the most powerful wizards in the past few generations. His fame even matched Chris Potters. The ministry had offered to pay to have an eye just like Alastor Moody's (the Weasleys were after all a poor family), but Ron had famously remarked that the world would never be big enough for two Mad-Eyes.

His ritual went just like those before him, up until the point where he was told to kneel. At this he shocked the crowd by refusing.

"Why do you refuse?" the herald asked.

"My leg does not permit me to." Ron explained.

"Then what will you do instead"?

Ron thought for a few minutes before apparently reaching a decision. He threw his cane as far away from his possible so that he could not move with ease, and put his wand into the care of his father. He then bared his neck in submission. The ultimate symbol of submission in wizarding culture.

"I bare my neck so that should the Monarch wish, he may smite me down and I can not oppose, even should I wish to".

After the shock of his actions wore off he was sworn in like those before him, and when his sword appeared at his side, his cane which he had thrown also appeared and it was known that magic approved of his actions.

After that Ginny Weasley who was also well known was sworn in, although she had to add in the stipulation that should her brothers' die without issue, then her children must take up the Weasley family name in order to continue the line of Seneschals.

"Are all those who need be shown presented?" the herald asked after all the people had been sworn in.

When no more people stepped forward, the herald said "Then let it be known that the Seneschals have been accepted".

A few moments were taken in order to let the words digest.

"Then let the Ritual begin".

With that he brought out the scroll of names and called out the first name. As the young girl walked forward the Seneschals moved to stand at attention round the ritual circle, in order to act as a protection for any would be Monarch.

The crowd began to chat and the noise increased as the Ritual progressed. But Harry, Fleur and Hermione watched in silence. They knew the importance of what was taking place.

## Gringotts Ritual Room

As the day progressed more and more names were called out, some garnered more attention than others, but for the most part the people taking part in the Ritual were ignored, by everyone but their family and friends.

When Fleur was called out, she took a deep breath before gracefully walking up to the Ritual Circle. She got a few wolf whistles from hormonal males, but she ignored them with poise. The Herald however sent a few withering glares around the room. He clearly disapproved of anyone disrupting the ancient traditions of the Ritual with such disrespectful attitudes. When Fleur was finished Gabrielle was called, and she unlike her sister practically bounded up to the centre of the Circle. Her smiling face and carefree attitude had Harry struggling to contain the grin that threatened to appear on his face, especially when instead of standing solemnly in the centre of the Circle she spotted Harry and waved wildly.

The next person that Harry paid any amount of attention to was Hermione. She unlike Fleur approached the Circle nervously, and she seemed incredibly relieved when nothing happened. When she reached Harry and Fleur again, Fleur gave her a huge hug. Hermione was shocked at first and froze up in her arms, before returning the hug tentatively. Fleur decided then and there that she was going to draw Hermione out of her shell.

It was only a short while later that a name was called that had the entire room silent and watching in eager anticipation.

"CHRISTOPHER POTTER" announced the Herald.

From his vantage point Harry could see as Chris drew himself up. Lily hugged him quickly whilst James put a fatherly hand on his shoulder before nudging him in the direction of the Ritual Circle. Everyone who was looking could see that they were acting in the perfect example of family supportiveness.

Chris walked arrogantly up to the circle and stood with his head in the air, and his feet evenly spread out, as he waited for the Ritual to take effect. He waited almost to the point of awkwardness before a look of disappointment fell on his face and he dejectedly walked towards his waiting family, where Lily enveloped him in a hug.



The watching people also felt disappointment, as he was expected to be the best chance that the Wizarding World had. He was after all considered to be the most powerful wizard in generations. However the populace perked up again when Glory Potters name was called. After all she was the first Potter female to be born in generations, the one who was powerful enough to break the curse that prevented any female Potter from been born alive.

Glory like Chris walked up to the Circle arrogantly; she stood in the Circle staring haughtily down at all those who were waiting. She too showed her shock when she was not chosen and looked on the verge of tears when she reached her parents. She did not openly cry however as that would present the wrong image, but Harry new that she would be getting a lot of new things when she got home, to placate her temper.

The next person called was Harry, and although he new he was next he still had to be given a push by Fleur in order to move towards the Circle.

Harry gained a few curious looks and whispers as he walked to the Ritual, but for the most part people went back to their conversations, after all it wasn't as if he was expected to be chosen was it? He was just the twin of the Boy Who Lived, nothing more. Harry himself didn't expect anything to happen, and rather just wanted to get things over with so he could begin his holiday with Fleur. He was very much looking forward to lying on the beach and visiting the sites, whilst enjoying the warm summer weather.

Harry stood in the centre of the Circle, with his head facing the floor. The Circle was placed in the middle of the room, as such he was surrounded on all sides by people, and for once he wasn't anonymous. He found he didn't particularly like the attention, and so he stared at the floor in the hopes that he could imagine that the people were not there. It didn't really work.

Harry waited in the Circle, for a few moments but nothing happened. After a certain amount of time Harry decided that nothing was going to happen and so made to move out of the circle. However he quickly found that he couldn't move his feet. A look of confusion and horror spread across his face. The room went suddenly silent to his ears, although he could still see people opening their mouths in

conversation. He could see the Herald look impatient, and could see him moving towards the circle pointing his finger and telling him to make room for the next person to go. He could see James Potter glaring at him, angry at the scene he was making. He could see Chris and Glory shooting superior looks at each other, and at him, and he could see Fleur growing increasingly more concerned as the situation progressed.

Slowly a light tingling began at the tips of his toes, where he was stuck to the ground. It spread throughout his body, from his feet, right through his heart, around his head, and up the length of his arms. It started off pleasantly before it grew in intensity up until it was a burning pain that could almost rival the Cruciatus Curse. It felt like he was been burned in a fire, one which started from the inside and expanded outwards, so that all the intense heat was contained inside him.

Slowly the noise of the room returned to him, and he could hear the sounds of shouting and screaming and chaos. And amongst it all their was one scream that was louder then all the rest, and he realised that it was him that was screaming, and the screaming grew in intensity, and he could feel through the pain tears running down his face, but they also burned, and he was losing vision and the sound was disappearing again, and he realised he was on the floor, and he couldn't see and he was pitching forward and then... nothing.

As soon as Harry started screaming chaos erupted in the room, as people became convinced that some sort of attack was occurring. However realisation over what was happening shocked people into silence, when the runes engraved on the floor began to glow and Harry to began to glow, with pure magical energy, which was the source of the burning fire that Harry felt.

Harry didn't stop glowing when he fell unconscious but the light intensified before dying quite suddenly in a huge burst of power. As soon as it was over the Seneschals converged around him, one kneeling down to check his pulse and his breathing. Once they were assured of his continued existence, they carefully and reverently lifted his unconscious form before carrying him out of the room to receive medical treatment.

One stayed behind briefly to whisper something in the Herald's ear, before following the others. The Herald nodded weakly still in shock

over the events. He took a few deep breaths, before speaking his voice shaking slightly. The hall was silent in anticipation.

"Let it be known that in the 1678th Year of Merlin, seven years have passed since the previous Ritual. Seven is the most powerful magical number and so we convene in the seventh month of the seventh year, as we have done for the last thousand years." He paused.

"Let it be known that in the 1678th year of Merlin, one Harry James Potter, Heir to the House of Potter, son of Lord James Potter Head of the House of Potter and Lily nee Evans Potter, was found by Magic and Ritual to be a worthy heir".

"Let it be known that a King has been found. Let it be known that Harry James Potter son of James and Lily Potter is that King. Let it be known that from this day onwards Harry James Potter will be forever known as King Harry I".

"The King has been found. Long Live The King".

At these words the hall erupted into chaos once again.

## Hogwarts Headmasters Office

### LONG LIVE THE KING!

In a surprising turn of events, yesterday morning a King was found, and it was not as many people predicted Chris Potter, instead it was his less well known twin Harry Potter. Harry (aged 15, pictured above in duelling robes) attends the prestigious Beuxbaton School in France.

A handsome boy, his appointment by magic has nevertheless caused controversy. There have already been concerns raised over his suitability to rule considering his young age. There have also been concerns raised over his possible bias. Traditionally the monarch has been a neutral party, however it is a well documented fact that Harry Potter possesses the dark ability Parseltongue (other notable speakers of Parseltongue are He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named (Dark Lord), and Salazar Slytherin (Dark Founder of Hogwarts)...

"How is this possible Albus"?

Albus Dumbledore was sitting calmly at his desk sucking on a sherbet lemon as James and Lily Potter sat anxiously before him.

"I'm afraid you might have to clarify my dears".

James clenched his teeth "how is it possible that Harry is the King"?

"Alas, I do not know, although I am most certain that he shall be a worthy one"

"Chris should be king"!

Albus gazed over the top of his half-rimmed spectacles causing both James and Lily to squirm in their seats.

"It does not do, to favour one child over the other".

Both James and Lily had the grace to look abashed, although they both got over it rather quickly.

"You have to admit Albus, Chris is the more powerful of the two, I mean he is the Boy Who Lived, how can Harry be King when Chris was rejected by the ritual?" Lily questioned.

"My dears, has it ever occurred to you that Harry is the older twin"?

At their confused looks, he went to explain, although he was sure that they already knew what he was going to say.

"The Ritual does not choose a king, but rather reveals who the king is. Harry was born king, Chris was born second, and thus no matter how worthy he may or may not be, he cannot be king. Console yourselves that you have one son who is so honoured, and another who is honoured by been named prince".

At this a look passed between the two Potters and Albus had a sneaking suspicion that the two were planning something, although what he could not guess, and in any case he was sure it would not be a bad thing.

He looked down at his pocket watch, and jumped back in surprise.

"Why look at the time, I have a press conference in ten minutes, on the front lawn, and it will take me that long to get there. You're welcome to join me of course, I'm sure the press will have a few questions for you, been the parents of the new king"

The potters exchanged another look.

"No thank you Albus. We should probably go visit our son. He is suffering from Ritual Fever after all." They didn't say that the only reason they were visiting was for appearance sake. In truth they really didn't care how he was.

Albus accepted what they said "Ah yes! Ritual fever, truly nasty for those who have it, thankfully it's very rare. I hope young Harry gets better soon, send him my regards for when he wakes".

Ritual Fever really was a nasty thing. It only occurred after a successful ritual, hence its name, but it causes unconsciousness, nausea, high fever, delusions and hallucinations amongst other things. Thankfully it was not deadly if treated and left no lasting side

effects, but it was incredibly unfortunate that Harry received it from the Ritual.

"We will do Albus; may we use your fireplace?" Lily asked.

Albus nodded and before long the two Potters were gone in a flash of green fire, and Albus was hurrying down to the grounds of Hogwarts where a swarm of reporters were waiting in anticipation for him.

"...and I'll now be answering any questions you might have." Albus ended his short statement.

"Professor what do you think of..."?

"How will this effect..."?

"Is this going to..."?

The headmaster sighed before, pointing randomly at a tall reporter near the front. The others immediately quieted down to hear the question.

"Samuel Lovan, the International Cauldron. Headmaster their have been concerns raised over his possible dark bias, do you have any opinion on that"?

The headmaster smiled slightly, glad that he could answer that question.

"I suppose your referring to his Parseltongue abilities? Ahh yes! Well as was reported several years ago, the gift was passed along in the magical backlash of the night Voldemort" he paused for the wincing "attacked. However magic has a way of balancing things out, if he has such a notable dark gift, then it is probably very likely that he has a less noticeable light ability. He might not even know that he has it, but I am certain that it will reveal itself in time".

The reporters scrambled to write down what he was saying as Albus pointed to the next person.

"Luna Lovegood, the Quibbler. Is it true that King Harry is suffering from Ritual Fever as a result of the RopTurps carried in Chris

Potters hair gel?" she asked the question with utmost sincerity before nibbling on the end of the sugar quill she held in her hand.

Dumbledore looked confused for a moment before smiling benignly.

"Why yes Miss Lovegood. Young Harry, excuse me, His Majesty is suffering from Ritual Fever, and is currently unconscious in the hospital. However I'm not sure if... what are they called, RopTurps... are the cause of his predicament. Next question please".

Luna opened her mouth to continue her line of questioning but was interrupted by the next reporter.

"Mariette Bloon, Witch Weekly. Do you know if the Kings condition is improving?"

"His Majesty is stable at the moment, from what I have heard from Lily and James Potter. They were in my office this morning, but have now returned to their sons' bedside. They really are dedicated to their children. Next".

"Aidan Dubon, the Evening Oracle. With the arrival of a King, the way of governance is bound to change, not to mention the fact that the old aristocracy has been revived. How are these issues going to be resolved"?

"I'm glad you asked that question. I know that the ministries across the world are already having talks to discuss their options. However a full wizengamot meeting will be held as soon as the king is in a suitable condition to attend. In the mean time, governance will continue as normal." He explained.

The reporters continued to squibble down his answers. Albus knowing it was unavoidable pointed at the next person, already dreading the question she would ask.

"Rita Skeeter, Daily Prophet. Headmaster with Harry Potter been named King, their have been people questioning whether your decision 14 years ago to name Chris Potter Boy-Who-Lived was in fact correct." She questioned with a look of glee on her face.

The people around her looked shocked at the line of questioning and looked towards Dumbledore, eagerly awaiting what was sure to be a good reply.

Thankfully for Dumbledore he had been expecting that line of questioning and was certain he could nip that line of thinking in the bud. It after all wouldn't do at all for people to question the legitimacy of the Chosen One.

His eyes twinkled, and he answered in the picture of grandfatherly benevolence.

"That is a very good question, but let me assure you that I am certain beyond any doubt at all that Chris is the Boy-Who-Lived." He assured.

"How can you be so certain"?

"Well I won't go into the reason why I am so certain. Security concerns after all. We wouldn't want the information to fall into the hands of any Voldemort sympathisers. I will however tell you that the fact that young Harry is king actually reinforces my belief that Chris rebounded the killing curse that night".

"How can it reinforce your belief"?

"Well as you know when Voldemort was vanquished that night, Lily Potter attempted to sacrifice herself for her two children. It was initially my belief that that sacrifice on top of Chris Potters' raw power was enough to overcome Voldemorts' killing curse." Dumbledore of course did not mention the prophecy. It wouldn't do for that information to get out.

"However that explanation seemed incomplete after all there are many powerful wizards who have succumbed to the killing curse, and there have been many mothers who have sacrificed themselves for their children. But now we know that there was an additional element at play that night." He paused to allow all that to sink in. The reporters were riveted on what he was saying. He had never revealed that much of his theories of that night's event before.

"Babies, much like animals are much more magically aware than we adults are. It is possible that baby Chris on some instinctual level,



recognised the innate majesty of his twin and sought to protect him. The desire to protect his liege lord would have automatically boosted his own power levels. However it is also possible that he sought to protect Harry even at the result of his own life. That sacrifice on top of his mothers sacrifice could have been enough to provide him with a level of protection that Voldemort could not overcome".

The reporters seemed to accept his answer and moved on to a different line of questioning. Dumbledore fielded the questions for a few more minutes before asking for one final question.

"Professor, there have been calls by members of the public, for the King to abdicate his position in favour of his brother, what is your response to that" it was Rita Skeeter again, and the question was more than controversial. While several of the Boy-Who-Liveds' most ardent supporters had made those calls, they were overwhelmingly shouted down by those people who were proud enough that a king had been chosen at all.

Dumbledore himself frowned before answering the question.

"Ms Skeeter, Magic has chosen Harry Potter as her king. If he was not worthy he would not have been chosen at all. I for one will place my loyalty behind my king 100% as I expect everyone to. Although I will recommend waiting until he is old enough to take the responsibility before he assumes the throne".

With that he drew the interview to a close. He was confident that he had negated many peoples concerns over the new king, although only time would tell. Now, he thought, all he could do was wait until Harry woke up.

Everything was now in his hands.

St. Mungos top floor.

It was three days after the Ritual had taken place and Harry Potter had spent most of that time in fevered delusions. He had been placed in a private room on the top floor and the entire corridor had been cleared out, except for medical staff, security and other approved people. The entire populace waited on baited breath for his recovery.

Assigned to the room was a guard. He was tall, and had the sort of face that you were sure that you'd seen before. In other words he was indistinguishable. This made him a useful auror; especially when you take into account his dedication and commitment to the corps. He was a light wizard who had taken part in countless battles during the first war, and had his own fair share of injuries. He had jumped at the chance to guard the new king's door, considering it to be a major honour, and the first signs that he was being considered for greater things. He took his work seriously, and guarded the king diligently against any possible threats.

The only problem was that that guard was currently unconscious, tied up and locked away in an unused storage cupboard on the third floor, and was unlikely to be discovered for a while. The man inside the room was using polyjuice, and was at that time a very real danger to the boy king.

The Man, Bruce Doyle, was a fanatic. Not a death eater or another Voldemort supporter. No. He was a supporter of the Boy-Who-Lived. He was furious when he found out that this usurper had taken the place of what in his mind was the rightful king. He wouldn't have been angry if Chris had only not been chosen, disappointed yes, but not angry. But to have his twin chosen in his stead! To know that Chris would have been king, if he hadn't been cheated by his elder twin brother that was galling.

It never crossed his mind that there was no guarantee that magic would have chosen Chris, because in his mind it was Chris that was the greatest wizard that ever lived, and could possibly even rival Merlin for power. No he knew that if Harry Potter disappeared, Chris would become king. It was that simple.

Unfortunately for him, killing Harry Potter in Saint Mungos was all but impossible. It was impossible if he wanted to escape afterwards.

After all he wanted to be free to live in the utopia that would be brought about by the rule of Chris Potter. Saint Mungos was neutral ground, and was as such protected by a strange sort of magic that was reinforced by all the healing spells that were cast every day. The neutrality of the place meant that it was impossible to commit an act of murder within its walls. That wasn't even mentioning the guards that were sure to be stationed around.

But he had a plan. If he could get the boy out of Saint Mungos, then he would be free to act in any way that he saw fit. So he had waited, waited until corruptible men were put on shift in the main corridors. Men who were not particularly, bright or loyal, but who were greedy and could be bribed, and although Bruce was not a particularly wealthy wizard, he was willing to part with his earnings in order to achieve his ends.

It was then only a matter of stunning the boys' chief bodyguard, drinking the polyjuice and waiting for the medical staff to leave the room.

It had taken a long time, for all the healers and nurses to leave. They seemed to be constantly in and out, checking the boys' vitals, feeding him potions and generally making sure he was comfortable. Often when he was just about to make his move another person had come in to do some minor task and he had to wait patiently instead, but now he was sure enough time had passed.

Slowly Doyle made his way over to the boys' bed. The white sheets were sticking to his lower half, and the boys face was red with sweat. His chest was bare, as the doctors had thought to keep his body temperature as cool as possible, and the top had been counter productive to that. Earlier that day, he had even witnessed the boy been given an ice bath, to cool him. The boy had shrieked and squirmed, but it had been a necessary task. Despite his high temperature, Doyle could plainly see his trembling form and too pale, clammy skin. Doyle felt a moment of guilt and pity for the boy, but he was resolved in his actions, so loyal was he to Chris Potter.

He reached out one gloved hand, and shook the boys shoulder. He jerked awake and looked around the room wildly, before settling a pair of glazed, green eyes on him.

"Wha, whe..." he stammered. His voice was hoarse, with both the screaming he had done earlier and as a result of his illness. Unthinkingly Doyle sat the boy up and gave him a drink of water.

"You're in the hospital, you've been very sick. But you've got to move rooms".

The boy just looked confused and Doyle realised that he was still delirious and had no idea of where he was or what was going on. This would make things easier as the child was far more likely to cooperate. He would not be aware of all those things he had been taught about the dangers of the world and would be far more docile.

"Get out of bed." Doyle commanded.

Harry unthinkingly did so, obeying the man without question. However his legs could not support him in this weak state and his head swam. He fell to the floor in a heap.

Doyle just rolled his eyes in disgust, and scooped the boy up, supporting his weight. Then half carrying, half dragging he took the king out the room. Holding him like that Doyle could feel the heat radiating off the boy, and could smell his sweat. The child was also muttering feverish nonsense and was completely gone.

The corridors outside the room were like planned empty. He had paid off the guards to make sure that route was clear, and so he made his way unchallenged. This was a very risky endeavour; as if he was caught he would be tried for treason, as he had no way of escape.

He made his way down three flights of stairs. He would have taken the lift, but that had to be avoided, as the lifts were likely enough to have people in them. However wizards were typically lazy and so were far from likely to take the stairs.

However Doyle had not taken into account the trickiness in carrying a practically unconscious person down a flight of stairs. Harry whilst small for his age was by no means light, having built up a healthy muscle mass, from his numerous sporting activities. It would have surprised many people to know that he was actually heavier than his taller brother, as Chris rarely did any exercise other than the occasional quidditch match. It was a fact that quidditch itself was

hardly a decent work out. The reason why professional quidditch players were in such excellent physical condition

was because of all the drills and training they did off the pitch to improve their game. Weight training, ballet and running were typical for most athletes.

Nevertheless Bruce Doyle had made good progress carrying the weight, and was half way out the building when it happened.

He could hear round the corner the heavy thump of approaching footsteps. Panicked he looked around. He was in a bright, white well lit, narrow corridor. There was no rooms on either side of him only a small cupboard which was not big enough to hold both him and his package. There was no where to hide, and he could not run fast enough with Harry to avoid been seen. He looked around wildly thinking desperately what he could do. He considered fighting but in truth he was a coward, and he had no interest in been sent to prison. Where were those guards, and why hadn't they done their jobs, he wondered furiously. But in the end it didn't really matter, as he needed to get out of here and fast.

Abandoning his plan, he threw the boy to the floor, and bolted down the corridor and out of sight just as the approaching person rounded the corridor.

## St Mungos Hospital

Ron Weasley was not having a good day.

Scratch that. Ron Weasley was not having a good week. It had all started on the lead up to the Ritual. He had been nervous about getting all his steps right, and finally joining his brothers and the rest of his family in their positions as seneschals. The day of the Ritual arrived, and Ron was extremely nervous. He had woken up early, and tried his best to make himself look presentable, only to find that Fred and George had hidden his only ritual robes. His mothers screaming and shouting had only delayed them further, and they had ended up in Diagon Alley mere minutes before the Ritual was to begin.

Thankfully with seven children the Weasley family had a lot of experience with tardiness and were able to compose themselves. Molly Weasley even had enough time to lecture the twins about appropriate behaviour. The two had for once listened and performed their role to the matronly woman's satisfaction.

Ron himself had gone through his own Ritual without a hitch, and had proudly stood at attention, whilst watching out of the corner of his eye the rest of the Rituals. He had seen both Chris and Glory Potters Ritual, and silently laughed at their reactions when they were not chosen. Ron Weasley hated the Potters.

He had watched in confusion as a third Potter was called up. The confusion changed to shock when the Ritual Circle reacted to the boys' presence. Shock changed to anger when he realised he had sworn loyalty to a Potter. Anger was quickly replaced by training though, when the new King collapsed. Despite the fact that there had not been a monarch in so long, the seneschals were still trained extensively in their duties from a young age. They still kept hope that eventually a ruler would be chosen, and if one was then they would be needed.

Once the monarch was safely transported to St. Mungos and a guard was set up, Ron had a few minutes to think. He did not like the fact that a Potter was King. Ron knew that the Potters were arrogant, and too sure in their own abilities. They had let all the fame go to their heads, and their actions had far reaching consequences. However Ron was able to think logically, and after the events in his

first year, he had trained himself to look at things objectively. He realised that he did not know Harry Potter at all. He was rarely if ever mentioned in newspapers (although that would change now), and from what he had heard at school, Glory and Chris only ever mentioned him in a disparaging manner, and even then they hardly spoke of him at all. Indeed most people were unaware that there even was a third Potter child!

Furthermore Ron had seen Harry with his own eyes. Chris and Glory had revelled in the attention, during the Ritual. Harry had seemed to hate it. Chris and Glory had strutted arrogantly to the circle. Harry had shuffled over with his head down, and his eyes averted... shy. Chris and Glory were standing with their parents, surrounded by adoring fans. Harry had been on the opposite side of the room.

Ron was not an unfair person. Nor was he stupid, and he refused to label this person in the negative group that he had put the other Potters in. However he wasn't completely trusting of this new person and so he decided privately to reserve judgement.

After all this though, came a new problem. He was being hounded constantly by reporters. They asked the most inane questions. They asked about his view on the outcome of the Ritual. They asked about the new King's health. They asked if he was excited to have a king again. All these questions he asked in the same way. Yes he was pleased to have a new king and he was happy with who the king was. No he couldn't comment on the state of the king's health, they would have to ask the healers... and so on and so on.

Ron hated reporters.

When he was younger he had always wanted to be famous and rich. He had felt overshadowed by his elder successful brothers. He saw himself as just another Weasley. Nothing special. Then the events of first year happened, and he was instantly famous. But Ron was a changed man, the act though heroic had permanently scarred him. He had nightmares for weeks, and just remembering the sight of the possessed Professor Quirrell was enough to make him physically ill. People who had previously rejected him as an attention seeker, suddenly acted like they were best friends. He became distrustful of people, and those who had scorned him, found themselves rejected in turn.

The reporters themselves were usually enough to put Ron in a bad mood, and this on top of all the stress of the new King was enough to have Ron permanently scowling. But no that wasn't enough. That morning three days after the Ritual, Ginny had had one of her relapses, and had to be rushed to hospital to receive treatment.

Ginny was the main reason that Ron despised the Potters.

She had as a child been enamoured with the story of the boy who at just one year old vanquished the Dark Lord. It had been her favourite bed time story, and at just five years old, she had declared to her amused parents that one day she would marry the Boy-Who-Lived. It was not to be.

After receiving her first Hogwarts letter, the family had gone to Diagon Alley. Ron had skived off, still affected by the events at the end of the year, and so had missed the events that transpired. Whilst in flourish and blots for the book signing of Gilderoy Lockhart, the family had ran into the Potters. Ginny in her excitement had tried to make friends with Chris Potter. Chris had cruelly and loudly rejected her, noting her obviously second hand robes. Ginny shocked and humiliated had turned and fled, knocking over a pile of books in the process. One of which was a certain diary belonging to a Tom. M. Riddle. This diary happened to land in her cauldron although none of us knew it at the time.

Then the family was off to Hogwarts. Ron so absorbed in his own problems had not noticed the increasingly withdrawn and reclusive nature of his normally excitable sister. However he did notice when the attacks started. He and Neville Longbottom (his only friend, as he was the only one outside of his family who had not rejected him the previous year. Although that could have been because he had no friends himself), had diligently researched to find out what was causing the attacks. They had through sheer luck, managed to work out what the creature was, and possibly even where the entrance was. Then it happened. A message appeared stating that her body would lie in the chamber forever.

Not even thinking the two boys had ran off to her rescue, not noticing a certain Chris Potter following behind them. They had found the entrance and with a liberal use of blasting curses, they



had managed to make a whole in the entrance large enough for them to jump through.

It was only when they were down, that they realised that Chris had followed them. He had accused them violently of setting the basilisk on the students, and said that he would be hailed as a hero

for taking down the perpetrators of the attacks. They had tried to reason with him, but to no avail, and soon they had come to blows. The spell fire caused an avalanche of rocks, which had separated Neville Longbottom and the other two. Neville had gone on ahead, and through a copious amount of luck and with the help of Gryffindors' sword, and Dumbledores' pet phoenix, had managed to slay the basilisk and release Ginny from her possession. Not without receiving a nice big basilisk bite and new scar on his arm for his troubles though.

With Ginny, phoenix and sword in tow, Neville had made his way back to Ron and Chris who had set aside their differences enough to clear away a whole in the avalanche. They had with the help of Fawkes managed to fly away to where Dumbledore and the other professors were waiting. There Chris had tried to get Ginny expelled for her actions, whilst simultaneously trying to take credit for the slaying of the basilisk. This had sealed Rons' dislike of Chris for good. Thankfully the diary had enough dark magic around it to absolve Ginny of her crimes, whilst Nevilles' basilisk scar and Fawkes's apparent attachment to Neville refuted his claims, and proved the events to have happened the way Neville and Ron reported them.

Chris had not received punishment for his actions, but he did receive a lecture on the dangers of jealousy. His role in the events was of course hushed up. Neville like Ron received an award for special services to the school, and he also became famous. Tabloids proclaimed him as the 'Basilisk Slayer' a name that Neville liked enough that at the age of fourteen, he had tattooed on his arm, right above his scar. Neville got a new found confidence that had him improving in all areas of life. Both Ron and Neville had also become inseparable, to the point that Neville would call Ron his brother in everything but blood.

Apart from all that, everything returned to normal. Students were unpetrified with the use of mandrake potion, and classes resumed.

Then it happened.

People had assumed that Ginny had been saved from her possession with no consequences. They were wrong. In the middle of a charms class, she had violently started shaking and seizing, magic coming off her in waves breaking glass, and swirling papers in an uncontrolled burst of pure magic. She had been rushed to hospital, where wizards had done everything possible to stabilise her and her magic. It was discovered that her magic and her life force had become so intricately connected to the diary, that the loss of that link had caused a backlash on her magic. The results were that her natural bonds which kept her in control of her magic were rapidly breaking down.

All wizards and witches had these bonds, and they broke down naturally over the course of their adolescence. When a wizard or witch reached the age of 17, the last of the bonds break down in their magical inheritance. What was happening to Ginny, was that the bonds were breaking down in one go, and the results were that her own magic was killing her.

Thankfully for Ginny, the healers managed to put artificial bonds in that stabilised her magic and her control. However Ginny was warned that for the rest of her teenage years she would have to have regular check ups to insure the security of her magic and health, and that until her magical inheritance she would continuously have relapses.

Ron was pretty sure that the recent Ritual was what caused Ginnys' latest relapse.

Ron had spent the morning in Ginnys' hospital room. He was tired and cranky, and wanted nothing more to than to leave. He despised hospitals. The girl however was smiling happily already recovered, although the healers wanted to keep her in over night to observe her. She was as usual in these situations surrounded by her entire family, who never got used to seeing her in such a vulnerable state. Her seizures were always violent, and the family was constantly worried about her.

Ron got up to stretch his leg, which was tired from sitting in the same position for so long. Arthur Weasley who was sitting by his daughters' bedside noticed his restlessness and had an idea.

"Ron." He began.

"Yeah dad"?

"Since we're already in the hospital, why don't you go and check on the king"?

Ron frowned, and opened his mouth to protest but stopped himself. Really he had no reason not to go, and in truth he was bored enough that the walk and change in scenery would do him good. Still though Ron had appearances to maintain, and he couldn't appear too happy to do this chore. So grumbling unhappily, he grabbed his cane, and limped out the door.

Ron was getting increasingly perturbed. He had been hobbling along for several minutes, and had not run into a single person. This was even more unusual, due to the fact that St Mungos was always busy. At the very least he should have run into an auror guard, who were there for the protection of the king. So far he had been completely unchallenged.

Then he heard it. The sound of something large hitting the floor with a loud thump and someone's footsteps pounding on the floor as they ran away. Ron hurried his own pace and he rounded the corner.

He looked around and immediately his eyes centred on a body lying sprawled on the floor, obviously the sound he had just heard. Immediately his wand was in his hand and he searched for any hidden attackers, only to realise belatedly that the person had just moments ago fled the scene.

Suddenly Ron had the image of the empty corridors engraved in his mind, and the entire thing stank of corrupt officials and dirty dealings that had Ron seething in anger, his face turning as red as his hair. However he quickly got his temper under his control and assessed his situation. The man on the floor was clearly alive, if the feverish ramblings were to go by, but what state he was in Ron had no idea. In any case it was important to get him to a room again, however he

was reluctant to leave him alone in the corridor, just in case whoever had abandoned him there came back for him.

Ron approached the man, and reeled back in shock. It was the new king. Suddenly his protective gears were in overdrive. He had sworn an oath of loyalty and service to the man and someone was trying there best to undermine that. The question was who? There were loads of people who had reason to be dissatisfied, death eaters, and ministry officials in fear of their jobs and livelihoods, supporters of Chris Potter and even ordinary criminals looking to make easy galleons. The problem was that whoever it was, they clearly had at least a few friends in the aurors and that was a troubling thought. It was clear to him that he couldn't trust anyone. In that second he decided that he was going to personally stand guard over the king. He wouldn't renege on his duty or oath.

Looking around the corridor he realised that he needed to get the king back to his room and fast. Then he would raise the alarm, and a search would begin for the person who had taken the king from his rooms. An inquiry would be launched about the lack of guards and changes would be made.

With difficulty Ron hoisted Harry onto his shoulder and limping carried him in the direction of his room. It was only when they reached the top floor where the corridor of his room was that Ron suddenly found himself surrounded by aurors, pointing their wands threateningly at him. Ron growled at them.

"How is it that I find His Majesty, completely alone and unprotected yet you only just realised that he was missing from his room? Bloody hell, if I hadn't by sheer chance come across him, then he'd probably already be out the hospital and long gone by now." He spat.

The aurors looked around confused but lowered their wands, when they realised that Harry was safe with Ron at least. They remembered his oath.

One man, and auror captain by the looks of things, assessed the situation and took charge.

"Sampen, Dafon. Assist Seneschal Weasley in getting His Majesty back to bed. The rest of you spread out and search the place. Find out what happened to the auror who was on the door, and for gods'

sake. Don't let anyone out of the building. This place is on lockdown people and I want answers." He barked his orders.

Ron let the two men take the load off his shoulders before following them into the room.

"Seneschal, you may stand down, we'll take it from here." The auror captain said.

Ron frowned.

"What's your name captain?" he asked somewhat offhandedly.

"Auror Dawlish".

"Well Auror Dawlish, do you think that I trust your men to look after the king after that show of incompetence and possible corruption, which by the way I will be reporting to Madame Bones directly? No sir. I will insure that from now on their will be at least one Seneschal with the king at all times. I can at least trust them".

Dawlish bristled in anger.

"Why you little..."

"Little what Auror" a smooth voice interrupted from the doorway. There framed looking as elegant as always was Lucius Malfoy. He had come in at the end of Rons' tirade, but had already gathered from the chaos in the corridors that something significant had happened.

"I for one agree with Seneschal Weasley and will be only to glad to take my turn guarding my liege." He inclined a respectful head towards Ron, a Malfoy and Weasley for once in complete agreement with one another.

"Stay out of this Death Eater." Dawlish spat.

Lucius turned cold eyes towards the auror.

"Now, now, Auror Dawlish, such accusations. It is a well documented fact that I was under the imperius curse, and I do not appreciate such aspersions against my character".

Dawlish just spluttered angrily.

"Do not worry, Auror Dawlish, young Seneschal Weasley and I have no wish to get in the way of your investigation or your job. We just wish to insure His Majesties protection, we are Oathbound after all. You wouldn't want to get in the way of an Oath, now would you?" he smirked.

Ron watched on in amusement.

Dawlish had no reply to such a statement, as though he had no wish to concede defeat, there was no reason to deny their wish. Especially since technically the Seneschals were in charge of the kings protection. So in a huff Dawlish turned heel and stalked out the room, slamming the door behind him as he went. Harry let out a fevered mumble and then went silent again.

Ron turned an inquiring look to Malfoy, wondering why he had aided him.

Lucius just smirked and turned to look at the bed where Harry lay sleeping, and suddenly he understood. Lucius may be a dark wizard, he may even have been a Death Eater, but he was just as bound by oath as Ron was. He was in the end, just as loyal, and though they may differ in opinion, they had the same aims, and goal, and purpose, and that purpose lay ill just a few feet away. In that moment of clarity and understanding, although Ron did not know it, the feud that had been fought for several hundred years between the Malfoy's and Weasley's ended, and they were united once again.

## Department of Magical Law Enforcement: Ministry of Magic

Amelia Bones was sitting in her office staring at the papers which cluttered her normally tidy desk, as more and more papers swooped in and landed on it. She had never had more work to do in her life. She had to organise a protective detail for the new king, not to mention the amount of aurors that were been sent out to disband drunken wizards who took their celebrations just a bit too far. The obliviators were working over time and to top it all off she had a headache that only threatened to get worst as the day wore on. The aurors were normally stretched thin anyway but the last few days had been manic.

She sighed as she picked up her quill to do the most important and pressing piece of work. She absolutely loathed paperwork and often wished that she could still be out in the field instead of dealing with the mindless bureaucracy that was her current lot in life. It wasn't as if she disliked her position. No she had worked hard to get where she was, rising quickly through the ranks of a male dominated department. She was immensely proud of her position, especially since she was the first witch to hold the job. But she hated the amount of time she wasted on filling out pointless forms, that the chances were no one would ever read.

She had only been working for about five minutes when she heard a commotion from outside her office, and she frowned. She stood up meaning to put a stop to the racket, when the doors to her office slammed open and in strolled Cornelius Fudge, twirling his bowler hat in his hands. Behind him was his usual posy, and to Madam Bones disgust Dolores Umbridge. Amelia didn't think that there was a more despicable woman out there.

"Minister what is the meaning of this interruption?" she asked.

"I should be asking the questions, what has been going on in the hospital and why wasn't I informed." He blustered.

Madam Bones blinked slowly and raised her monocle to her eyes stalling for time. She had hoped that Minister Fudge would not find out about the incident, and had purposefully kept the information from him.

"A small incident Minister. It is been dealt with".

"A small incident, a SMALL INCIDENT. Amelia the king was almost kidnapped under our very noses. I want some answers." He shouted.

"Minister I would kindly ask you to calm down, the incident is been handled." She placated.

"CALM DOWN. Madam Bones, the press is having a field day, and that simply won't do. I won't be made a laughing stock. I want action. I want the culprits apprehended and them to be kissed. The public demands it. And what about that auror who was supposed to be guarding him. I want him disciplined and thrown out of the corps. Well Amelia"?

"Minister Auror Wilkinson is currently undergoing treatment in the healers wing, and no Minister you will not go and disturb him. He is undergoing treatment as we speak, and is understandably distraught about what he sees as a failure in his duties. He will not be disciplined, but there will be an inquiry as to why security was so lax to allow one person to get in..."

"Hem hem"

Amelia closed her eyes annoyed at the interruption.

"Yes Delores"?

"Why, am I to understand Madam that you have already apprehended the culprit." she asked oozing sweetness.

"Yes Delores".

"Excellent, then there shall be no need for an inquiry. Your team is an asset to the corps Madam..."

"With all due respect Delores an inquiry is necessary. The man who managed to get into the room should not have been able to..." She was interrupted by Fudge.

"But Amelia, an inquiry is really not necessary, especially with the Ministry on shaky grounds as it is. It really can not afford to have such negative publicity..."



As Fudge droned on, Madam Bones frowned in thought. The man was corrupt she knew, but he was been terribly adamant about not having an inquiry. Her suspicions were peeked and she was resolved to look into the matter. The Minister was hiding something and she was determined to get to the bottom of it.

"...and of course he will get the Kiss. No need for a trial..."

"Excuse me!" she exclaimed aghast.

"Why, there will be no need for a trial." Fudge explained slowly as if speaking to a small child.

Madam Bones took a few deep breaths to calm herself.

"Minister Fudge are you seriously suggesting that we disregard the law by giving the man no trial".

Fudge looked uncomfortable.

"Now Amelia... there's no need... why you know that... its just... the case... its so cut and dry... why waste the time and ministry hours too... well there's just no need to." He faltered at her scathing look.

"Minister it is the right of every person to have a fair trial. Every...Single...Person. I will not get rid of that right no matter how cut and dry the case is. Now if there is nothing else I have an inquiry to set up and work to do." She looked pointedly at the door.

"Now Amelia..."

Madam Bones was in danger of losing her composure. Instead she calmly took hold of her quill and began signing forms, a blatant dismissal.

Fudge bristled for a few moments, before turning on his heel and marching out of the room, the others following behind him. As the door slammed shut, Amelia could faintly make out Umbridge saying...

"The nerve of that woman, speaking to the Minister of Magic like that, I have half a mind too..." before the voices faded away.

At her desk Madam Bones leaned back, and smiled in amusement.

It was only an hour later when there was a knock at her office door, she called for them to enter, and was surprised to see a young woman enter only to trip over her own feet and drop the handful of parchment she was carrying on to the floor. The women scrambled on the floor for a few minutes to pick it up. With a sigh Madam Bones pulled out her wand and with a wave the parchment stacked and organised themselves before floating lazily in the air. The young woman stood up and blushing terribly grabbed them.

"Yes Auror Tonks"?

"The initial results of the investigation Ma'am." She said whilst passing the pages over to her boss. She then stood awkwardly at attention in front of her desk, as Madam Bones perused the files.

When she finished she placed the report in front of her, and gestured for Tonks to take a seat which she did, awkwardly perching on the edge of it. Madam Bones inwardly rolled her eyes.

"Relax Auror Tonks; I want to know what you think".

"About what ma'am"?

"The report Auror Tonks, I presume you've seen it"?

Tonks nodded her head, indicating she had seen it, but hesitated in answering.

"Auror Tonks, I'm not going to fire you for giving your opinion, but I want to know what you think".

Tonks hesitated for only a moment longer before speaking.

"In all honesty ma'am I don't like it. This Doyle character... he should never have been able to get passed the guards, he's not clever enough, and quite frankly he's not powerful enough. The only way he could have got in was if he had help getting in".

Madam Bones agreed. She had been thinking the same thing, but it was good to have her suspicions confirmed by an outside source.

Now she had to think of a solution to the problem. She thought for a moment before smiling slightly at the headstrong auror in front of her.

"Tell me Auror Tonks you're a metamorphmagus correct?" she asked, even though she knew the answer.

"Yes Ma'am".

"Tell me, how far can you transform?"

Tonks looked confused at the line of questioning but answered dutifully "all the way ma'am".

"And how long can you hold your transformation for"?

Tonks had a look about her, and a spark of realisation appeared in her eyes as she realised where the line of questioning was taking her. She sat up in her chair, a look of determination about her.

"Indefinitely ma'am".

Madam Bones sat back in her chair and smiled widely.

"I have a mission for you Auror Tonks..."

St. Mungos top floor

The healer in charge of the King was busy bustling around the place. Mixing various potions together and measuring them out in order to coax them into the King. He heard a loud groan behind him, and hurriedly grabbed a pain relieving potion before turning to face the bed.

There staring wide eyed was the King. The healer ignored this as the king had been awake but not lucid several times before then. He made the way towards the bed, holding the potion out in front of him.

He almost dropped the potion in shock when the young man, reached out and grabbed his arm, preventing him from administering the potion.

"Where am I?" he croaked out. His mouth and lips dry from dehydration and misuse.

Silently the healer stared, and took a step back in shock, before remembering himself and hurriedly bowed, careful not to spill any of the potion. Harry stared confusedly at him.

The healer forgot all things that he was supposed to do. There was only one thing on his mind and that was that the king was finally awake.

## St. Mungos Top Floor

He was swimming along gently within a slow moving river. He didn't know how long he had been swimming for, but it was a while, a very long while. He didn't have any concept of time, but he knew that he had been swimming for a long time, because things had changed.

At first he was swimming in the scorching sun, the water boiling around him. Every muscle exerted itself in moving, in keeping afloat, in going forward. The water too was dangerous. Waves crashing in either side, tossing him about, so that he threatened to drown, but sheer perseverance kept him above the water.

Then it ended, quite suddenly it seemed to him. Strange even, but he refused to dwell on it. The sun just dipped out of sight, and there was complete darkness no moon to light the way, and he was lost in the swelling waters, Waters which were suddenly freezing. So cold that he felt himself go numb. The cold crept its way inside him, an icy fist clenching around his heart and lungs, every breath and pulse was agony. Struggling for breath he inhaled deeply, but instead of air he took in water, foul tasting water which had him choking and spluttering, but he felt the pain subside and the cold recede and then the cold was gone, and the sun was shining again.

Then the water was soft and enveloped him in its comforting touch. He was content to let it lead the way, content to float and not struggle anymore. The river was lined with thick forestry, so thick that he could not see within. Sometimes he heard voices coming from the forest, but they were distant, unimportant.

Sometimes streams joined the river. They were coloured strangely, pink, blue, red, purple. And every time he passed these strange coloured streams he would drink from them. Sometimes they tasted foul, and he would try to spit them out, but found that he couldn't. He would feel as if someone was clenching his mouth shut, and stroking his throat, urging him to swallow. He would resist, but he would be overcome, and he would weep, at his failure to surmount the enchantment on the water. But other times the water would taste of strawberry or something else sweet, and he would lap up the stream until it was dry, and his thirst was quenched and then he would continue on, feeling better than he had before. Although before he had drunk, he had not known that he was feeling bad at all.

As he was floating, the river would change directions, suddenly turning, or slowly meandering around. It was because of this winding nature that he did not notice until he was upon it when the river came to a halt suddenly in front of a huge dam, made of brick and stone. He examined the wall in confusion. Not knowing where it had come from. He examined it, feeling hands across the rough material. He frowned as he touched it. This wasn't right. This shouldn't be blocking the way. It was wrong. It shouldn't be here. He wanted it gone!

Violently he shoved against the wall, but it stood firm. He tried again, and this time the wall shook. He swam further away, and then sped up to the wall, the water shoving with him.

A single stone fell from the top, and then another fell. Slowly the wall began to crumble, from the top downwards, but the wall was falling around him, sending up huge waves of water, and then from behind the wall, a great tidal wave came and submerged him. Swirling him around with great force, he struggled his way to the surface, fighting his way against the currents, forcing himself, trying just a little bit harder, pushing himself further than he had ever done before. He struggled with his every strength, reaching higher and higher until with a great breath he reached the surface and broke free...

He opened his eyes, as pain assaulted his body and he let out a groan of pain. The walls of the room were white and unfamiliar, and there was a strange man approaching him with an unrecognisable potion. He reached up to stop him giving it to him, surprised at the heaviness in his arms. The man seemed shocked to see him, or perhaps he was merely shocked to see him awake. A question passed the boys parched lips, but instead of answering the man gathered himself and bowed, sending the boy into confusion.

He tried again.

"What's going on"?

The man seemed confused.

"Your Majesty is in the hospital sire, recovering from Ritual Fever." he explained.

Harry reeled back in shock.

"Your Majesty... but... what... that's impossible!" he finally exclaimed before breaking down into a coughing fit.

He instantly felt a pair of hands rubbing his back in soothing circles, and a glass of water been held to his mouth to ease him. He drank heavily, his lips dry and parched, and his mouth tasting foul.

"Your Majesty must not excite yourself. You are still weak, and can easily relapse." The healer explained.

Harry tried to work out what was going on, but his head was too muddled, and there was a dull throbbing behind his temple, and really he was just tired and wanted to go back to sleep. He heard a door creek open and in walked two people. They stopped short at seeing him awake and looking at them, one of them recovered well by smoothly going into a graceful bow, whilst the second stumbling copied him.

"I trust you are doing well Your Majesty?" the first, someone who Harry recognised as Chief Dark Seneschal Malfoy, asked.

"Why are you calling me that"?

"I'm afraid I don't understand Your Majesty's question?" Lord Malfoy replied.

Harry took a breath.

"Why do you call me Your Majesty? I am not a King, I can't be a King." His voice had a note of hysteria to it.

"Are you telling me that you don't know that you're the king? How can you not realise when the ritual circle reacted to you. I would think it would be obvious." Minister Fudge said with a note of scorn in his voice, which had Harry looking down at his bed in embarrassment and Lucius Malfoy reaching for his wand in anger.

The healer on the other hand seemed to realise something and asked Harry to look at him, before shining his wand in both Harry's eyes, tilting his head this way and that. He then jotted a few things down in a clipboard before looking up and smiling. Minister Fudge was getting impatient.

"Well out with it man, what's wrong with the boy... I mean His Majesty?" He quickly corrected when he noticed Malfoy's hand on his wand.

The healer instead of answering turned to Harry.

"Well Your Majesty, what is the last thing you remember".

The announcement had the entire room in silence, before Lucius recovered.

"Healer, are you telling me that His Majesty has amnesia"?

"Not at all." The healer replied to the confusion of the room.

"Then what are you asking?" he questioned.

"Please my Lord Seneschal, if you would be patient, I will explain after His Majesty has answered my question".

They all turned to look at Harry who had a look of concentration on his face.

"I think..." he began slowly. "I think that the last thing I remember is Chris going up to the Ritual Circle." suddenly realisation hit him. "Wait is that the reason that you keep calling me King, because you're confusing me with Chris".

Harry was still very tired and not really with it, otherwise he would never have come to that conclusion. The Healer laughed at his answer, and even Lucius cracked a small smirk before he quickly covered it up with his usual haughty look.

"No Your Majesty, We are not confusing you with your Royal Brother, but your answer does answer some questions." He turned slightly to address Malfoy and Fudge. "If My Lords remember, His Majesty went through a lot of pain when the Ritual reacted to him. It is my belief that his partial memory loss is a result of that pain, as the body will not wish to remember such an event. It is nothing to worry about, and I'm sure that with time His Majesty will remember the events that led up to his reveal".



Harry finally understood.

"So I'm the king then"?

"Yes Your Majesty".

Harry lay back in the bed, and closed his eyes briefly.

"What's going to happen to me then"?

"Why Your Majesty will rule of course." Lucius replied.

"No I mean... what will I actually do... I'm only 14... my birthdays not for another week... I'm still in school... I... I... can't possibly rule...I..."

"Which is why..." Lucius interrupted his rambling smoothly, "there will be a meeting to decide several issues as soon as you are well enough to attend".

Harry nodded his head in understanding, before looking up questioningly.

"Mr... I mean My Lord Malfoy, why, if you don't mind me asking, are you been so nice to me. I mean. I know you're my Seneschal for the dark, but... well... I'm a Potter... and you know Potters and Malfoy's have always being you know enemies. Well wouldn't you try to avoid me or something, or at the least be resentful towards me"?

Malfoy seemed to think this over for a few moments before coming to a decision. He approached the bed, and then went on bended knee before his king, taking Harry's hand in his he kissed it, and then still holding the hand he spoke earnestly in supplication.

"Your Majesty, I know that you do not understand the loyalty that so many of your subjects feel towards you, but know this. I swore an oath before you and magic that I would serve you in any capacity that you may require of me. Your word is my law, and it is my duty and privilege to follow it. I would lay down my life for you in an instant, and if you ordered it I would strike down your enemies. I am your Majesty's Seneschal, and though you do not know all my duties, know that I will follow and fulfil each one of them to the best of my abilities. It matters not to me, the name of your family only that you are my liege lord and King, chosen by magic and by Ritual. Though

Your Majesty will forgive me, if my thoughts of your family, does not match my esteem for you." He ended with a smirk, before quickly bowing his head.

It was to that image that the door swung open and three people loudly entered the room. Malfoy was immediately on his feet with his wand out facing towards the intruders protecting his defenceless king. But seeing who it was he lowered his wand, although he could not quite mask the disgust and loathing he felt for the people.

"Harry!" the woman screamed, before rushing forward and enveloping the shocked boy in a hug.

Harry on instinct returned the hug. Lily Potter (for that was who the woman was) then took Harry's face in her hands and seemed to examine it, the epitome of a caring mother. Harry looking directly into her face though, could see only the glint of greed and the normal actions of someone who was concerned with appearances alone. However he knew his role in this and immediately acted like the perfect son, happy to see his mother.

"Harry we were so worried, we've been waiting to hear night and day about your recovery. Why weren't we informed immediately upon his awakening." She shot the last question towards the healer.

"I apologise Your Grace, His Majesty only awoke a short while ago, and we have not yet had a chance to inform you of this development".

Harry shot his mother a questioning look as she perched on the edge of his bed, still clutching him.

"Your Grace"?

"Yes Harry, it was decided that the Kings parents cannot be without high noble titles so both your Father and I have been accorded dukedoms. Your Father was accorded the independent title of Duke of Dover, which of course makes me the Duchess of Dover. I was accorded the independent title of Duchess of Kendal. Of course these titles are new titles and thus are in name only until you formally bestow them on us, not like your brother and sister whose titles as legitimate heirs are inherited. You'll have a lot of work cut

out for you when you bestow properly all those in name only titles that have been handed out over the years".

Chris and Glory who had been quiet up until then, approached the bed.

"How are you feeling Harry?" Chris asked.

"A little sore" Harry answered honestly.

"Your Majesty should have said something sooner." Lucius admonished, as the healer rushed off to get a pain potion, which Harry drank with a grimace.

Glory sat down on Harry's other side taking his hand in hers, whilst Chris took the bedside chair, forcing both Fudge and Malfoy to look out of place in the family gathering (the healer was back to preparing more remedies, and in any case he was not permitted to leave the king unattended during his recovery). Fudge was suddenly reminded that he had a meeting to attend with "His grace the Duke of Dover" and "the esteemed Lord Headmaster, and Your Majesties Chief Warlock" and so made his excuses and ran out the door hurriedly. Malfoy refused to be cowed and took up a spot in the corner of the room sneering at the new occupants, but keeping out of the family discussion.

Glory and Chris both looked anxious to say something but were mindful of speaking with Malfoy in the room, but Harry could guess what they wanted to talk about.

"So Glory and Chris what are your official titles"?

They both grinned smugly, but Chris spoke first.

"I am His Royal Highness Prince Christopher William of Magic, Heir apparent to his Majesty the King (until you have children of course Harry), The Duke of Fife. Glory is Her Royal Highness Princess Glory Lily-Rose of Magic, the Duchess of Albany. She's second in line to the throne".

Harry turned to Lucius.

"Lord Malfoy, what is my full title"?

Chris and Glory exchanged grins at his ignorance.

"Your Majesty retains the shortened title of Harry I, by the Grace of Magic, of England, Scotland, Ireland and France and of His other Realms and Territories, Head of all Magical Beings and Defender of Avalon. You also retain several other dukedoms, and titles both Magical and Mundane. The Queen, your cousin, has requested a meeting to discuss your role in the mundane world, as soon as you are able".

"I didn't know that we were related to the queen." Glory said to her mother, looking very pleased.

"Excuse me, Your Highness, but you are not related to the queen. Your Royal Brother however became The Queens cousin on his ascendance to the throne. It apart from anything else legitimises his status in the non-magical world." Though what he was saying was polite, and respectful he somehow managed to inject a mocking tone into it, that made Glory feel like she was a complete fool.

"Oh Harry dear, I almost forgot!" Lily exclaimed as she rummaged through her purse, before pulling out a wand and shrunken Trunk. "The Delacours were hanging around waiting for you to awake with all your things. I told them that they were silly to do so and insisted that they go on their holiday without you. Here are your things and wand".

"But Mum I saw the Delacours waiting downstairs earlier today." Chris protested.

Lily crossed her arms over her chest and said crossly.

"Really now, that's just been ridiculous. They should not still be here, but somewhere on a beach. It's unseemly that their still here. Why people will talk about their intentions, after all their daughter is a veela and I will not have my sons virtue impugned upon by rumour and scandal. No I will insist that they leave at once. "She said standing up.

"Mother please, don't do that. She's my best friend".

Lily looked down at her son and gently patted his head slightly patronisingly.

"I know that Harry, and before that was ok. But you're in the public eye now, and you can't afford to be friends with her, At least not publicly. You can carry on how you like in private, but I'm afraid I have to insist that she leave".

Harry was visibly upset at this news, but he knew better than to protest. Lucius on the other hand had no such compunctions and so moved to defend his Kings will.

"I'm afraid Your Grace that I can not allow you to do that. His Majesty is clearly unhappy with that decision, and His Majesty's word is law. I will insist that you allow the House of Delacour to remain. Your Majesty would you like me to invite them up here later".

Harry knew that he would pay for this decision later but he agreed with Malfoy. Lily appeared angry for a moment, but covered it up well.

"Well then, I'm afraid that we have business to attend to. Come on Glory, Chris. Goodbye Harry, I hope you recover soon. Malfoy." She nodded her head, and with Glory and Chris at her heels, she stalked out of the room.

Later that day Fleur came into the room, with her family behind her. She gracefully curtsied to him before running forward and embracing him in a hug.

"How are you feeling, do you need me to get you anything Harry... I mean Your Majesty".

Harry smiled at her mothering. "Fleur you don't have to call me Your Majesty, we have been friends for far to long, none of you do".

"I'm sorry Harry, but I have been so worried, those wicked people wouldn't let us come and see you. They wouldn't believe me when I said that we were friends, thought I was just some fan or something".

"Fleur darling" her father interrupted "we really can not blame them, after all we wouldn't want them to take the risk with our new king".

Fleur reluctantly agreed, and Harry eager to change the subject asked them how their stay had been so far.

"Horrible." She said. "The food has been atrocious and fattening, the beds are nothing compared to those at the chateau, and the weather has been so poor that I have not been able to step outside. Why just look at me!" she exclaimed "I'm positively pale".

Harry smirked "so you're having a great time then".

Fleur flew back into a chair.

"Wee. I have enjoyed the sights immensely, particularly the muggle ones. We are staying at the Savoy Hotel on the Thames, but I have already seen Big Ben, and of course the Cathedral. There is much more that I would like to see, but we have spent most of our time at the hospital. And whilst I do not doubt that British medical care is excellent, one hospital is no different to any other".

"True, I have only been awake for a few hours but I am already sick of it. Unfortunately I proved just a few hours ago that I am not ready to leave".

Fleur nodded in understanding. Harry had a history of trying to leave hospitals prematurely, and this time was no different. Lucius had popped out of the room for a few minutes and the Healer had gone to get a few more potions. Harry had seen his chance and decided to leave. He had thrown off the covers, and stepped out of the bed, grabbing his wand and shrunken trunk, which he shoved into his pyjama bottoms. He had barely taken a few steps however when he collapsed in pain, letting out a small cry as he fell. Thankfully for him, the guard who was outside the room (and who would have prevented him leaving even if he had proven himself able) heard the cry and came rushing in, assuming an attack. Instead he found his king collapsed on the floor, and had to help him back into bed. Harry had blushed all the way back and embarrassed had resolved to wait until he was released.

"When will you be released Harry?" Gabrielle asked.

"I'm not sure".

Gabrielle looked to the floor downcast.

"I have an idea. How about when I'm released, we go and see all these English sights together. I haven't seen most of them and it can replace the holiday that we cancelled".

"That's sweet Harry but, I'm afraid you won't be able to do that." Fleur said.

"Why"?

"Because Sire, you will be required to take up responsibilities. Even if you relinquish some roles until you are older and finished your education, it will seem irresponsible for you to be seen to neglect your duties by visiting all these sights so soon after your reveal." Lucius explained.

"Oh"

"Perhaps though... it will not be unseemly for you to entertain foreign dignitaries, and the Delacours are certainly high enough ranked in France to count as such. Perhaps they may accompany you on certain events, say on a visit to the Queen. It will certainly not be improper for you to request a tour of her residence, and I'm sure the Delacours will be interested in that." He suggested.

Harry grinned. That was not a bad idea at all.

"So what else has been going on in the world"?

Marius smiled at Fleur.

"Oh nothing much, most of the news has been about you. 'King Harry is revealed', 'The past life of the King', 'King still suffering from Ritual Fever', 'Attempted kidnapping of the King foiled'..."

"What?" Harry shouted, sitting up sharply in his bed.

"Apparently a man got you several floors down before you were found by Ron Weasley. He then insisted that a seneschal be with you at all times. A full inquiry is being launched at the Ministry, headed by Madam Bones herself. The people were up in arms over

your near kidnapping, so soon after your discovery. Security around you has being tightened considerably since then." Marius explained.

Harry shot a look at Lucius Malfoy.

"Yes that's why I am here Your Majesty, although I believe that Sir Charlie Weasley will be taking the night watch".

"Oh". He lay back down again, "anything else that I should know".

"Not that I can think of Your Majesty." Lucius answered.

Fleur however said "Viktor tried to get time off to come but his coach said that 'Quidditch waits for no man, not even the King'. When Viktor told him that it was for the king he was trying to get the time off for his coach just reiterated his point. He sends his greetings though, and said that you better get better soon so that he can get back to trouncing you at Quidditch. I think though that he's really worried about you".

Harry nodded "I'll send a message to him. I really would like him to come and visit. I think that I'm going to need you guys more than ever. Its all so confusing, and everything is going to change, and well, you two have been my best friends for as long as I can remember, and I really don't want to lose that".

"You won't" Fleur said simply and strangely enough that simple comment was enough to abate all Harry's worries about his friendship.

The Delacours stayed for several more hours before Harry's eyes began to droop, and they made their goodbyes. Not long after that, the Healer forced a dreamless sleep potion down Harry's throat and he drifted off into an untroubled sleep.

The Carriage and Thestral Inn: Kentish Town

The Thestral, as it was called by the patrons who frequented it, was aptly named. A dark, seedy place filled with smoke, and smelling of cheap Ale and Beer, it was a favourite of both Aurors and Crooks alike. Seeing as how half the Auror corps were crooks though, this was hardly surprising.



What was surprising was the male who entered through the front door. He was according to rumour, locked behind bars in a high security cell.

"Doyle" a man shouted from the corner. "Bruce Doyle, how did you get out of prison"?

Bruce smirked. "They couldn't pin anything on me mate." he said as he slowly made his way over to the table.

The Auror who was at the table called for a drink for his friend, which Doyle gratefully accepted. They drank together for a few moments before the man, an Auror called Witteman spoke.

"Look Doyle, I'm sorry I wasn't where I said I was going to be, it's like the moneys good and all. But I've got a wife and kids, and as much as I support Chris Potter... You know I do... I just couldn't do it. I couldn't commit treason, not for any amount of money." He explained looking truly apologetic.

Doyle just stared over the glass at him, unflinchingly. Witteman wiped a sweaty piece of hair from his eyes.

"It's not like I was the only one to back out Doyle. Small and Dillon did to, and you're not confronting them..." he took a shaky breath. "Look I haven't ratted you out. I haven't ratted any of you out, but that's as far as I will go. You can have the money back even, but I'm not committing treason for you".

He threw a sack of money at him, which Doyle took, but he remained silent.

Witteman was clearly becoming more and more unnerved.

"Look what do you want from me Doyle. You haven't even got pinned for anything. By Merlin Doyle what has got into you?" he was shouting and panting by the end of it and the entire pub went silent staring at the two.

Doyle calmly stood up, and leaned over and whispered something in Wittemans' ear that had him paling. He made to leave but Doyle reached out a hand and grabbed his arm preventing him from taking another step.

"Here's your money" he said as he threw the Galleons back at him, the money jingling as Witteman caught it. He had spoken softly, but in the silence everyone could hear his words clearly.

Then he turned and walked confidently out of the Thestral and with a pop disappeared. Witteman stood for a few minutes, all eyes on him before he too left the establishment.

Not ten minutes later an up and coming Auror called Nymphadora Tonks walked in.

## The Lovegood Kitchen

In a strange house shaped like a rook, an even stranger girl stood in the kitchen humming a nonsensical tune, her hands gently kneading dough, whilst the smell of cooling bread wafted over from where it rested by the open window. This would seem like a somewhat normal occurrence were it not for the fact that the sun had yet to rise, that and the teapot kept forgetting it was a teapot and was trying to help the girl whilst making a complete nuisance of itself. Luna (for that was the girls name), was preparing the bread to make as an offering for the Wheatabells who infested her garden. She hadn't actually seen the creatures, but she knew they were there, for why else would she have had such an unusual urge to get up and make bread so early in the morning.

It was a good thing, she decided, that they had come to her house so early, as if they had come later she would not have had time to make the offering, and that would not do. Who knows what an angered Wheatabell would do? Why, she might wake up one morning to find her room covered in sticky dough, or might even find her favourite hot chocolate mix turned to flour!

Luna finished kneading the bread, and instead started rolling and shaping it, and then finally she placed it in the oven, pushed back her hair with a flour covered hand (incidentally turning her blonde hair white), and sat down in a chair. The teapot finally remembered it was a teapot and hurriedly poured the girl a cup, which Luna accepted gratefully with a cheerful thank you.

The sun was beginning to rise and so the other utensils started the process of making breakfast. A wooden spoon took up the post of conductor as it directed frying pans, sieves, knives, forks and spoons to their appointed tasks, and soon the room was filled with the smells and sounds of sizzling bacon, and fresh, juicy, red tomatoes, and hash browns. In the corner the wooden spoon had enlisted the help of a stirring bowl and a grater and was in the process of making a cheese and mushroom omelette.

Soon the breakfast was ready and so the oven glove cheerfully brought over her plate, just as a yawning Xenophilus Lovegood in canary yellow pyjamas entered the room.

"Morning Sweetie." he said as he gave her a kiss, and another plate was brought over to him.

"Morning Daddy." Luna replied.

"I see you've been making bread this morning." commented Xenophilus.

"Yes Daddy, we have a Wheatabell infestation." Luna replied.

Xenophilus looked at his daughter in shock.

"Sweetie, you don't just give Wheatabells bread. They might get offended." he explained.

Luna nodded sagely. "I Know that Daddy, but I put in raisins and figs just like you taught me to, and Wheatabells love the taste of raisins and figs".

Xenophilus smiled at his daughter and agreed that that was indeed the right thing to do. The two turned back to breakfast, before Xenophilus once again spoke.

"I've being meaning to talk to you about the article you did when you went to the press conference, can you speak to me after breakfast"?

"I'm sorry Daddy, but I have to go to the Wizengamot meeting today, remember"?

The Lovegoods had traditionally been a matriarchal family, and so Luna was obliged to attend important Wizengamot meetings. In her younger years after the death of her mother Xenophilus had served as regent for the family, however Luna had decided at the age of twelve that she was quite old enough to take her seat, and despite the scandal it had caused (or perhaps because of it) Xenophilus had agreed. In any case he probably wouldn't have been able to stop her anyway. Luna had, after all, the annoying habit of always getting what she wanted. Many thought that it was because most people didn't know what they were agreeing to until long after Luna had left.

"Since when"?

"Since last night, Daddy. Don't you remember? An owl came in the middle of dinner last night to tell us that the King would be well enough to leave hospital today and so we were to have a meeting this morning, and you thought we were being attacked by an evil shape shifting monkey, and wouldn't believe it was just an owl, until after you tried to feed it peanuts, which it refused to eat".

"Luna it was an evil shape shifting monkey." he argued.

"No it wasn't".

"Was".

"Wasn't".

"Was".

"Wasn't".

"Was".

"Shotgun Wasn't." Luna cried.

"Damn, you always get me with that one." Xenophilus complained.

"Don't worry Daddy, you just have to remember that Shotgun rules. I'm sure you'll win sometime." Luna placated.

Not appeased Xenophilus picked at his breakfast. Luna though wanted to know more about the article.

"Daddy what did you want to talk to me about with the article?" she questioned.

"Well Sweetie, you know that the Quibbler strives to give as factual and unbiased a report as it possibly can".

"Yes Daddy." Luna responded puzzled.

"Well you made a mistake with your article".

"What!" Luna cried dismayed. Xenophilus continued on.

"Your entire line of questioning was based on the fact that RopTurps influenced the Ritual and they came from Chris Potters hair gel. Honey, RopTurps live in ear wax, and despise hair gel, and it's Ripturns that induce Ritual fever. It's no wonder that Professor Dumbledore didn't know what you were talking about".

Luna began to sob. Xenophilius anxious to cheer her up, hurriedly spoke.

"Don't worry honey, everyone makes mistakes. I was going to ask you to write a new article. You see we have received news on a species of Crumple-Horned Snorkacks, that may live in this country, and I wanted to see if you wished to follow it up"?

"Really Daddy?" Luna gasped, after all the Crumple Horned Snorkack was one of the Quibblers most important stories.

"Yes Luna, I think your ready for this sort of article".

"Oh Thank You Daddy, I'll leave at once!" she exclaimed.

"But what about the Wizengamot meeting?" he protested.

"I'll skip it, its not important, not compared to this".

"Luna." he warned.

"Please Daddy".

He glared at her.

Luna pouted.

He glared some more.

She harrumphed "Fine then, but can I go after the meeting"?

Xenophilius smiled.

"Yay!" Luna shouted, she ran and hugged her father before running upstairs to get ready for the day.

Xenophilius sighed contently before grabbing the forgetful teapot, that was trying to grate some cheese with its spout.

Ministry of Magic: Chamber of the Wizengamot.

The Chamber of the Wizengamot was a grandiose room, made entirely out of white marble and gilded with gold and silver. Its ceiling was domed despite the fact that it was far underground and had several rooms and offices above it, and it was painted much in the style of the Sistine Chapel. It was made in the midst of Renaissance which was not only the height of muggle art and learning, but also of wizarding. It had taken thousands of Galleons (a substantial sum at the time) to build, and five years worth of labour, and that was with the use of magic.

It was also made at a time, when the wizarding world thought that the return of the monarchy was imminent and so had been designed with that in mind.

The Wizards and Witches, Lords and Ladies of the Wizengamot and members of the public trickled into the room and made their way to their appointed seats. The seats themselves were raised in rows, around the sides of the room, and positioned carefully so that everyone could see and hear that which took place on the floor. This was the might and centre of power in wizarding Britain, and today more so than any other. An air of excitement was abound, and newer and less experienced members chatted breathlessly with each other. Older members were solemn and were content to watch the process, whilst those with the mind for it were careful to seek out and remind each other of old alliances.

Eventually as the clock struck 11, the doors closed and then opened again admitting in five members who made their way over to a slightly raised platform directly opposite the door where stood four decorated chairs, a long wooden table and another chair of elaborate design. The members were Madam Bones whom whilst regent to the House of Bones stood in the Wizengamot in her capacity as Head of the DMLE, Albus Dumbledore; Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot, Percy Weasley; Junior Undersecretary to the Minister of Magic sat in his capacity as Scribe, and Madam Umbridge in her capacity as Senior Undersecretary to the Minister. The Minister himself sat in the centre chair, and called the meeting to order.

"Before we start the meetings agenda, does anyone have anything that needs to be addressed?" he asked, and immediately his attention was drawn to Augustus Longbottom who stood as regent for her Grandson. She stood up to address the Wizengamot.

"Minister Fudge, since we were called here in the knowledge that His Majesty the King will be attending this meeting, is it not meet that we should wait for his arrival, before beginning discussions, and if not, then at the very least His Majesty's Seneschals should be standing in as his lawful representatives. Yet as it is now the King is not here and his Seneschals sit in the House as common members and not as the first amongst us as it should be." as the matriarch spoke grumbles of agreement were heard throughout the chamber and a few "here, here"s were shouted.

Fudge just smiled and spoke calmly, having been briefed on this question before coming, " Lady Longbottom, I have being assured that His Majesty the King will be in attendance at this meeting. However since it is this morning that he is to be released from Hospital, we do not know what time he is to arrive, and so have decided to proceed with the meeting until he gets here. As for the Seneschals it is for the King to recognise them publicly as his chief servants, before they may proceed as his voice, something that I am sure the King will do during the course of this meeting".

Lady Longbottom sat down obviously not happy with the response, but with nothing that she could do to oppose it. A few more minor matters were discussed before the main purpose of the meeting began.

Minister Fudge cleared his throat pompously before speaking, "My Lords and Ladies, as we all know the King has returned and as such it is his duty to rule us.

However the King is still a child! He is only fourteen!" angry mutterings broke out as he was speaking and he raised his voice to be heard. "I am not questioning his Right to Rule, nor am I questioning his eventual ability. But my Lords and Ladies he is just a boy and may not yet be ready for the responsibility, and further is it right that we burden his shoulders with the weight of his crown, and take away the last of the childhood that he has remaining to him. Not only that but we have his education to consider. How would anyone manage both government of the country and learning magic at the



same time. And His Majesty will not just be running our country but the entirety of the magical world! No, it falls us the members of this noble body to find a solution to this problem".

As he was speaking furious whispers broke out and shouts of "Nay" interrupted him, but when he ended Amos Diggory stood up, shaking in anger.

"Who are you Minister Fudge, to decide whether His Majesty is fit to rule? Who are any of you, to decide that. You do not have the Right! You do not know him or his ability and yet you sit in judgement of him, and worst the King is not even here to defend himself! How Dare you"!

Fudge answered calmly "Lord Diggory, I do not presume to sit in judgement of the King, nor am I deciding whether the King is fit to rule. What I am asking is whether or not he is ready to rule? Can you honestly say that any fourteen year old can understand the burdens of Kingship? Can see past the glory of the crown to the responsibility and duty of it"?

A new voice joined Amos in the defence of his King "I spoke to His Majesty when he first awoke, and he questioned his worthiness and ability. I think Minister that the King understands all too well the burden he now carries. However I also believe that he is ready to carry that burden with all the honour and duty that the position deserves, and My Lords and Ladies we Seneschals both light and dark will be there aiding him and helping support him so that the burden does not seem so heavy." Lucius turned to face the Minister directly, "On that you have my Oath".

Minister Fudge bristled slightly before recovering himself "Well said My Lord Seneschal and though I do not doubt your words, I must call into question your ability to accurately judge His Majesty's ability, as you have of course only known the King a few days. To that end I request the advice of one who knows the King very well, and so invite His Grace the Duke of Dover to the floor".

With that James Potter who had previously sat silently watching the proceedings from his family seat, stood and made his way down to the floor. The people stood and bowed as he passed, as he was the first amongst peers.

James locked eyes with the Minister as he passed, and he made a small imperceptible nod. Amelia Bones who had not said much at all so far, suddenly sat up in interest and directed the question to the Duke.

"Lord Dover, what is your opinion on this matter?"

"Well Madam" he said smiling dashingly "Whilst I love Harry, sorry His Majesty, I must admit that I doubt very much his readiness to rule".

At this there was a huge outcry from the stands, and Madam Bones looked shocked.

"But Your Grace, I am confused. You did not express any misgivings about your other two children and Princess Glory is a year younger than the King. Why is His Majesty any different?" she questioned.

James frowned slightly "It's quite simple Madam, both Glory and Chris were raised in the public eye, raised knowing the responsibility and power that they held. It was quite obvious to us that both of them would become leaders in the society, and so we raised them in that knowledge. However Harry had no such training, the public largely ignored him, and though he seemed powerful, there was nothing to say what this power would amount to. Sure he would one day be the Head of House, but so would many other children and it did not seem that it would happen for a long time either and as such there was no reason to deny him any of his childhood with needless pushes towards an early maturity and the holding of unnecessary responsibilities. In short we treated him as if he was a normal child. Of course if we had known that he was King, then things would be quite different".

Many people who had been angry before were now appeased at what seemed to them a fair and logical explanation. Albus Dumbledore was very pleased as he was a firm believer in letting children be children and had been disappointed with James and Lily for burdening their children with duty at such a young age. It had been his fear that allowing Chris and Glory around the press so much as children would swell their heads, and make them arrogant in their abilities. He had been pleasantly surprised that but for a few occasions he had been proven wrong. Of Course if he knew the

truth, he would not be sitting there so smugly and would not have asked the next question.

"So what do you suggest Your Grace"?

James looked as if he was pondering the question for a few moments when in reality he had planned his answer carefully long before. He spoke slowly as if still thinking it out, but hoped to sway the public to his way of thinking.

"As the Minister said before, the burdens of Kingship may be too much for one boy to handle, and I agree. However maybe two boys could handle the power. I raised Chris to be a leader, as I never did for Harry. Chris is the heir apparent to the throne, and if it pleases the Chamber and the King I would suggest that until Harry, sorry His Majesty comes of age, Chris and Harry jointly share power".

Madam Umbridge sat forward and simpered at James "Your Grace, are you suggesting that two children should rule the country ahead of the Ministry, who has governed this country since the death of the last King"?

"Madam are you suggesting, that the Ministry has the right of government over established royalty?" James responded.

"And what of the Seneschals?" someone shouted from the stands.

Within moments the entire chamber descended into chaos with everyone shouting at everyone else, and it may have resulted in spell fire were it not for the doors suddenly flying open...

Earlier that Day: St. Mungos Top Floor

Harry Potter sat on the edge of his bed, staring at the floor. A nurse had woken him early that morning informed him that he was being discharged before giving him a couple of final potions and a breakfast fit for a king, which Harry reflected, he now was. He had then bathed and dressed, and had sat down to wait for his escort to the Wizengamot meeting. He had waited and waited and waited. It was only now that Harry thought that nobody was coming to get him. Harry considered getting up and making his own way there, but really he didn't even know where there was, and in any case he suspected that he shouldn't really be going anywhere unescorted.

But he couldn't just wait in the hospital room all day, he would have to find someone who could help him.

Harry stood up. "Well there's nothing for it", he muttered to himself and made his way to the door. But as he reached for the handle, the door swung open, and there stood the portly Herald from the Ritual. He seemed a trifle surprised to see Harry standing there, but he quickly recovered and swept into a low bow.

"Your Majesty." he intoned, before taking stock of Harry's appearance. "Why, Why aren't you dressed Your Majesty?" he gasped.

Harry looked down at his apparel in confusion. Whilst he wasn't dressed in a tux and dress robes, he thought he looked rather smart.

The Herald noticed his confusion "I didn't mean why aren't you dressed Your Majesty, I mean of course your dressed, but why aren't you in your Robes of State"?

"what Robes of State?" Harry thought to himself, and then asked.

The Herald spluttered "Your Majesty did the Royal dressers not come to attend you this morning"?

Harry just looked blank. The Herald took stock of the situation and quickly went to the guard at the door of the room. A few muttered words later and the Herald returned looking more than a bit angry.

"Those damned guards" he muttered, before remembering himself, "I apologise Majesty for the language, and for the idiocy of your guard. It seemed that those who were sent to prepare you for the meeting were refused entrance. Someone forgot to mention to the guard that they were coming. I've sent for them and they will arrive in a minute, but no matter what we are going to be late, and oh dear, on your first meeting to. It's not your fault of course Your Majesty, but it is an unfortunate event".

Harry who despite his cleverness didn't really understand what was going on, decided it was high time he cleared up some of his confusion.

"Excuse me, I recognise you as the Herald from the Ministry, but what exactly is going on? Why is it you that is escorting me the the Ministry"?

"Your Majesty I am your Herald, I escort you everywhere. It is my duty to announce your most royal presence so that none may be caught unaware and embarrass themselves".

"So you escort me everywhere"?

"Everywhere." The Herald agreed.

Harry smiled. "In which case My Lord Herald I would like to know your name, since you are clearly going to become very familiar to me." Harry held out his hand to shake, but instead the Herald took it and kissed it. This had Harry a little embarrassed, as Harry was used to only kissing the hands of the female sex.

"My name is Robert Your Majesty, and I would be honoured if you called me by that name".

"So Robert, who are these Royal Dressers, they don't actually dress me do they?" Harry asked, assuming quite naturally that they just helped arrange his wardrobe.

"Of course they do Your Majesty. As Gentleman of the Privy Chamber they were carefully chosen and selected to perform your most intimate tasks".

Harry blushed red in embarrassment.

"What other Gentleman of the Privy Chamber are there"?

"Well you have a huge staff, but off the top of my head, there's the Gentleman of the Robes, physician, barber, squires, pages, messengers, food tasters, Gentleman of the Stool..."

"Gentleman of the Stool!" Harry cried mortified.

"Why yes Your Majesty, their task is to..."

"I know what their task is, but I refuse, just...no" Harry spluttered.

"But Your Majesty it is one of the most honoured positions, The gentleman of the Stool is usually the one who becomes most acquainted with the King, and gains the most prestige out of their position".

"No, I won't have it. It's completely embarrassing! I won't have that position in my Household".

The Herald looked to argue some more but there was a knock on the door to signal the arrival of the Royal dressers, that seemed to remind him of his place and he nodded his head in acquiescence.

"Very well Your Majesty I will inform the Lord Chamberlain of the removal of that position from your Household, Shall I get the door"?

With that a group of gentlemen swarmed into the room, so that it seemed small and crowded. After bowing to him, they swiftly arrayed him in a black tunic embroidered with the Royal crest and other symbols of his majesty, and a Red Mantle trimmed with ermine. On his finger they placed his signet ring, and they placed a gilded sword at his side, and arrayed him with jewels and a great golden chain. His head which would normally wear a crown was left bare as he had not yet had his coronation, but a groom ran a comb through his hair and futilely tried to tame it, until with a sigh he gave it up as a lost cause.

All in all when Robert reappeared he looked quite regal, although Harry himself felt like a little boy playing dress up. After that the two (with guards and attendants in tow) hurriedly made their way down the corridors. Robert shouting "Make Way, Make Way for the King" as they went, so that patients and doctors alike flocked to see the commotion. Harry really didn't like the attention.

When they made it to the foyer Harry made his way over to the floor station. However the Herald had other ideas.

"Your Majesty, it is unseemly for you to take the floor, I have arranged for other transportation".

They went outside where standing there was a beautiful carriage made with dark woods and fitted with gold and silver, with the royal crest adorning the doors. To pull it were four Pegasus, two were

white and two were black, and standing at attention were three footmen all dressed in the Royal Livery.

As they got into the carriage, Robert said to the footmen "hurry as quickly as you can, we're already running late".

The footman replied that they would be there within ten minutes. Instead they were there in five, and Harry marvelled at the wonders of magic.

When they appeared in the Ministry building they were surprised to see that the room was almost empty, having expected a great deal of press to be lying in wait for them. However a young auror trainee was waiting for them and after bowing to Harry spoke softly to the Herald. Robert let out a shout of "Outrageous" before turning to Harry.

"Your Majesty they started the meeting without you. I would advise we hasten our pace".

Harry agreed and quickened his steps, as they made their way through the lifts and halls of the Ministry to the Wizengamot Chamber. However on reaching the doors they found their way blocked by two auror guards.

"Make Way for the King" the Herald cried at them.

The two guards exchanged glances, before one stepped forward bowing slightly.

"Sorry Your Majesty, but we have orders to not let anyone into the chamber".

Robert bristled in anger, "and do your orders override the will of the King".

The two guards shared confused looks, before one hesitantly shook his head.

"No Mi'Lord but I 'ave my orders and I could lose my job." he explained.

"I doubt that your orders meant for you to detain the King".

Some common sense seemed to permeate their heads.

"Very well Your Majesty, we'll let you in".

With that the doors swung open and they were met with the sight of complete pandemonium.

Harry and his companions stared around the room in shock, as the yelling wizards and witches slowly became aware of him standing there. The room quietened to the point of eeriness, as hundreds of faces turned to look at him. Next to him Robert cleared his throat nervously before announcing to the chamber in a shaky voice "P..Presenting... His Majesty...The King".

Harry took a step forward into the Chamber and as one the members bowed towards him. Harry noticed that his father had hesitated before following the rest of the Wizengamot.

He looked around clearly unsure of himself and unaware of what he should do, thankfully Lucius Malfoy and Amos Diggory moved to stand next to him, and he turned to them for advice. The movement of the two Seneschals seemed to bring the Wizengamot out of their shocked stupor, and several members quickly recovered. Minister Fudge was not one of them.

"Your Majesty."he acknowledged, before turning to an attending usher, "You there," he blustered, "Go get the King a seat".

The usher responded quickly and Harry moved to take the offered seat, but a hand on his shoulder stopped him, and he turned to see Lucius Malfoy turning a condescending smile on the Minister.

"That won't be necessary." he said quietly.

Fudge coughed, "What do you mean? The King can't just stand around, whilst the members of the Wizengamot sit before him! You of all people should know that. Its just...unseemly"!

Lucius just continued to smile, "Perhaps I should clarify. It is not necessary because you Minister are standing in front of the Kings seat, or rather throne".



"Preposterous." Fudge spluttered, but Madam Umbridge lent forward in her chair and gave a little cough.

"hem hem, I believe you must be mistaken Lord Seneschal. That is traditionally the Ministers' seat." she said.

"No madam, if you notice engraved on the chair is the crest of the King. The Minister has merely held the chair in trust, as he has all the Kings offices. Now if you please Sir?" he said whilst gesturing for Fudge to vacate the chair.

Fudge hemmed and hawed for a few moments, before realising he had no choice and with a huff said, "Weasley! Move over to let me sit".

Percy quickly complied and moved to continue with his notes on a lower table. There was then a quick reshuffling of seats at the head of the Wizengamot.

Harry moved to stand in front of his throne, and sat down. At once the other members of the Wizengamot and the watching public followed suit, their attention not leaving him. Harry was reassured to feel the presence of his Chief Seneschals standing behind him, at his shoulders.

With a jolt Harry realised that they were waiting for him to address them, and Harry nervously ran his hand through his hair (completely undoing what little headway the grooms had made).

"Um..." he began and winced at his eloquence, "what was the..err. commotion about when I entered".

Percy quickly recapped from the notes he had taken, and Harry barely held back a wince, at their judgement of him.

"Do you not think me worthy to rule?" he asked quietly, his head bowed slightly.

Madam Bones smiled at him. "No Your Majesty. I think I speak for all when I say that none of us doubt you, but you must admit that your age is a valid concern, and none of us wish to compromise your education. Maybe you can think of a solution"?

Harry thought for a few minutes, and pondered on the words of the Wizengamot. Harry had enough honesty to admit that he did not understand enough about government to confidently rule it. So far he had been relying heavily on his Seneschals and Herald, but that was not fair to them. Their concerns about his incomplete education was also valid, and Harry was just selfish enough that he would like nothing more than to sink back into obscurity within the familiar walls of Beauxbaton. He also knew though that that was impossible. More importantly though, he knew his brother's character. Knew that though he was loved by almost everyone he was not worthy of the throne. He knew that even if he had not been born, Chris would never have been King. It was frightening the clarity of that understanding, but with it came a resolve and a plan of action. He would not willingly share his throne with his twin. Harry glanced at his father, knowing that what he was about to say would displease him, but he was willing to face the consequences.

He spoke quietly at first but as he spoke he gained confidence, until those within the Chamber could almost feel the power that he held, both magical and majestic.

"My Lords and Ladies, I admit to my own doubts about my abilities freely and with clear conscience, and I know that your own doubts are not without Just cause. However I would not willingly give up what power was bestowed on me, or share it with those not chosen by Magic, and heed my voice, I was chosen by Magic." he paused to let that sink in.

"What then is the solution? I am not ready to rule, but Magic did not choose anyone else but me. Therefore I propose that the Ministries of Magic continue to rule in my name, until I come of age, or deem myself knowledgeable enough to assume responsibility. I propose that they do so with the aid of my Seneschals who are my chief servants and representatives. Yet I would not be wholly cut off, and so suggest that on matters of chief importance I be consulted, and that I may sit in on any meetings that I will, to advance my own learning, so that when I do assume full responsibilities I will be as adequately prepared as possible".

Madam Bones nodded in approval, "Your words My Lord are fair and just, and though your will is law, I put it to the Chamber to validate it. Who seconds this proposal"?

Lady Longbottom stood " I second the proposal".

"Then we will put it to the vote".

At once a sea of hands were raised, and a resounding raw of approval was heard. Harry's heart jumped.

"The proposal is passed".

After the noise died down, Minister Fudge asked what was next on the agenda, and was answered by Professor Dumbledore.

"We need to discuss His Majesty's schooling".

Harry sat up in his seat. "I'm sorry what's there to discuss? I just agreed to continue my education".

"Yes Your Majesty, but we need to discuss just where you will be attending school".

"I attend Beauxbatons." Harry said promptly.

"Yes Your Majesty, and it is a fine institute of learning, but one which in your present condition is wholly unsuited".

"Am I not king of France too?" Harry asked heatedly.

Dumbledore sighed. "Your Majesty, I fear you are missing the point, I am not raising this issue over the country the school resides in, but rather over your safety attending the school." Dumbledore could see Harry mounting another argument, so continued on quickly. "My Lord as you know I am the Headmaster of Hogwarts and as such have an extensive knowledge of teaching, and have visited and lectured in many schools. As such I can say that all the schools in the trinity are the equal in terms of learning, however in terms of safety Hogwarts is far superior. The wards alone at Hogwarts are some of the finest in the world, but if that is not enough then consider this. Beauxbaton holds frequent public events which allow members of the public to roam freely through its halls, this is a distinct danger to you, Your Majesty, as there is little way to monitor who comes and goes due to the numerous parks and grounds that surround the Institute. Even if Hogwarts held such events the danger would be much reduced as there is only one entrance into Hogwarts.

In addition Hogwarts itself has numerous protections should the wards fail, Beauxbatons has no such protections".

Harry could not argue with that logic, but he would not give in easily. He was happy at his school, he didn't want to leave it.

"France will not be happy to lose me".

"I have already spoken with the French Ministry and they agree that it is for the best. They have as much interest in keeping you safe as we do".

"but..." Harry faltered.

"Harry listen to the Professor, he knows what he's talking about, and I don't want to lose you." James said, putting on the air of a concerned parent.

"What about my friends?" he blurted out, before blushing at how childish he sounded. There were a few twitters in the audience.

"You'll make new friends." was the simple reply.

"How? It's not that easy. The friends I have like me for me. How will I know that the new friends don't just like me for my crown. I'm familiar with my school, why should I have to adjust to a new school on top of adjusting to my crown."

Harry felt a calming hand on his shoulder and looked into the reassuring face of Amos Diggory.

"Your Majesty a great deal of your Seneschals attend Hogwarts, you will have at the very least them to depend on".

Harry sighed and crossed his arms, but in the end he had no choice but to relent.

Afterwards there were several other matters to discuss. Where the King would live and how he would retain his Household was chief amongst those issues, but as Lucius pointed out the Royal Residences were in no condition to be lived in and his house did not have the capacity to retain the Kings extensive attendants. As such orders were placed to begin the restoration of his lands and holdings,

and in the mean time the Kings attendants were temporarily dismissed from permanent Royal service, although they were to answer if called. Harry was secretly quite pleased with this decision as the idea of hundreds of people waiting on him was quite off putting (although he knew that as soon as the Royal residences were complete, he would have them all back again), and as Dumbledore put it "wholly impractical for when you are at school".

Also discussed was the matter of the Kings security. It was decided that a permanent guard force was necessary, and though the decision was controversial, it was to be headed by Auror Captain Alastor Moody. Old Mad-eye was said to be quite paranoid, however none could deny his effectiveness, nor his commitment. James Potter also insisted on Glory and Chris being guarded, claiming that as heirs to the throne they were at risk as well.

The meeting went on for hours, and it was late afternoon when it finally came to an end. Harry was exhausted, both from the extensive debates and from sitting on the same seat for so long (even though it was a very comfortable chair). He stood up to leave the meeting, and everyone bowed again to him as he left. But the day was not yet over, for lying in wait for him just outside the Chamber doors was a swarm of hungry, eager reporters.

Ministry of Magic, outside the Wizengamot Chamber

It is a curious fact about the Wizengamot Chamber that when the doors are closed, not a sound could be heard from within. The reverse is also true, which is why when Harry stepped outside its doors, he was shocked to see the swarms of reporters congregating. He didn't have long to get over his surprise because upon seeing him the reporters immediately drew towards him. Harry was incredibly grateful to the Aurors who had suddenly appeared to hold the crowd back, which gave both Harry and the Wizengamot members a chance to move.

"Your Majesty".

Harry looked up at Lucius who had not left his side since the start of the meeting.

"Are you ready to meet the press Your Majesty"?

Harry was for a foolish moment tempted to say no, knowing that Lucius would then make it so. But he wasn't stupid. He knew that if he didn't speak to the paparrazzi straight away, their interest in him would only grow, and with the unreliability and bias of wizarding newspapers it would only be a matter of time before some trumped up rumour or damaging gossip made the front page. That wasn't to say that they wouldn't still do that, but it was far better to feed them bits of information so they wouldn't feel the need to.

"Yes, although I don't know what to say"?

Lucius smirked at him.

"Don't worry Your Majesty, let them ask questions. You can always refuse to answer them, and I doubt very much that the questions will be bad. They will be far more interested in the outcome of the meeting".

"errr...yes Your Majesty".

Harry gave a jolt as he had not realised that Fudge had joined them, Fudge continued uninterrupted.

"...if you would just let me speak for a moment, you know prepare them for you, give a little statement. Present a united front between Ministry and King, and that sort of thing. I'm sure Your Majesty will agree that..."

Harry rolled his eyes at his rambling.

"...and in Your Majesty's infinite wisdom, I'm sure you will agree that this the best way, and it will make things easier..."

Lucius made a move to silence the Minister.

"...more legitimate, you see..."

"All right Minister Fudge, His Majesty will speak after you." Lucius interrupted pointedly.

Fudge beamed at him, rubbing his hands together.

"Excellent! I'll go and prepare the press conference. "Weasley! Oh there you are, come on then. We have to..."He said as he walked off, Percy trailing behind him.

Harry and his Seneschals stared at the Ministers retreating back.

"Harry!" A voice shouted, and Harry turned to see his father making his way towards them. The crowd exiting the Wizengamot chamber made room for him. Then in full view of everyone he swept Harry into a hug. Harry could feel the Camera flashes go off around him, at the very public reunion. After a while James finished the hug, but did not release Harry. Instead holding Harry by the shoulders he stared into his face, inspecting him as if to look for any signs of ill health. Only Harry could see the slight warning in his eyes, and the tightness of his smile.

"Harry," he spoke just loud enough for those surrounding them to hear, "will you be all right by yourself. I need to fill your mother in on the Wizengamots decision"?

Harry nodded, and James smile widened, although it still did not reach his eyes.

"If you're sure"?

Harry knew very well that he had no choice but to be sure.

"All right then, I'll see you at home".

James then gave one fatherly squeeze of the shoulder that no one noticed was slightly harder than strictly necessary, but held a clear warning to Harry, and with a twirl of his robes and shouts of "Your Grace" he pushed his way through the crowds and went home.

### Alastor Moody's House

Alastor "Mad-Eye" Moody was having an afternoon kip when he felt the proximity alarms go off. He woke up with a start and reached for his wand, holstered even whilst he slept, and assessed the situation. It was only the outer wards so he had time, but not much, not enough to call for reinforcements in any case. Not that they would come he thought ruefully to himself.

He tried to think who could be attacking. Death Eaters was his instant thought. They have come for me. Well, he smiled grimly Let them come!

He cast a disillusionment spell on himself, as well as a silencing charm, before sneaking down stairs. His magical eye was swirling in place, in constant look out for traps and spells. A crash from outside revealed that at least one (Were there multiple enemies?) Death Eater had been caught in his dustbin trap.

A shriek of "Alastor!" quickly followed the crash. It was a shriek that Moody knew all too well. He limped outside to witness the sight of Amelia Bones caught in his trap. He cancelled his spells, and Madam Bones zeroed in on his location.

"Mad-Eye, let go of me now"!

Alastor considered for a moment not releasing her, but in the end his common sense won out, and with a wave of his wand (and a smirk on his face), Amelia was released from the dustbins, and she fell to the floor. Quickly she stood up and dusted herself off, before giving him a withering glare through her monocle.

"Really Alastor, enchanted dustbins"?



"They get the job done," he grunted, pointedly.

Amelia sighingly agreed.

"I suppose they do. Might I come in, I could really do with a cup of tea right about now"?

Moody shot her a side long look but consented, and the two of them headed inside. Within minutes they were sat at Moody's functional kitchen table, with a cup of tea and coffee in front of each of them. Following that was a few minutes of awkward pleasantries as they sipped their drinks. Eventually though, Moody got tired of waiting.

With a grunt, he said "Cut to the crap Amelia, What are you doing here"?

Wordlessly Amelia handed him a sealed scroll. He looked at her for a second before taking it. After breaking the seal with a table knife, his one eye scanned the document before he placed the scroll on the table before them. His other eye never left Madam Bones's face.

"I'm retired," he stated plainly.

Amelia snorted "There's no such thing as a retired Auror." You especially. She thought to herself.

He grunted, not disagreeing.

"Alastor," she pleaded.

He sighed, leaning back in the chair. His eye swivelling madly the only sign of his agitation.

"I got out of the game a long time ago. I've seen too much. I just want to live out the rest of my days in peace".

"With a hundred different traps and wards surrounding you, just to make sure." She quipped.

He just smiled wryly, not retracting his previous comment.

She reached out and took one of his scarred hands.

"Alastor, you're needed. I don't trust anyone else to this task. I don't think anyone else could do this task. Not like you anyway." She said earnestly.

"Amelia, I'm broken...old. The war...it affected me. You know that, probably better than most. I know what they say about me, how I'm paranoid, washed up, too caught up in my glory days. They don't understand how much I would like to forget those days. But I can't! I can't forget. Not all my scars...there not all... the ones you can't see, well they hurt me a lot more than the visible ones. I can't do it Amelia. I just can't. You would be better off getting some young, unscarred, up and coming Auror to do it".

"Most of those scars you got in defence of these young Aurors. You were the best Alastor, still are I say. Of course you're affected, we all were. Do you think that I don't wake up shivering most nights, or come downstairs in the morning relieved to find the rest of my family still alive. Don't forget that I was with you for a good deal of that war. I saw what you saw, and in the end, in the very end, you were still fighting. Still fighting, and you hadn't lost yourself. Not like so many did, and that I think is more important than what those people who haven't suffered, haven't lost a single loved one, haven't buried a comrade or someone that they trained, haven't killed like we have think. Retiring you was one of the worst mistakes the Ministry ever made, and I intend to rectify it." She said passionately.

"Your serious about this, aren't you?" He asked.

"Yes! Auror Captain Moody, I want you to be the new head of the Kings Guard. The question is do you think you are up to it".

Moody focused his eyes on her, both of them for a change. He stared for a good few minutes and Amelia Bones let him, knowing the conflict that was going on inside his head. Finally he eased up and grinned widely, a terrifying visage on his deformed face.

"Eh! Shouldn't be too hard. After all how hard can it be to look after one scrawny kid"?

Potter Home

Harry walked into his house tiredly. The press conference had taken a lot out of him, although the questions had been tame, concerned mostly with his thoughts on his Kingship, and on the Wizengamot decisions. He had of course confessed his surprise at his Royal title and backed up the Wizengamot whole heartedly. He had been glad for his Seneschals presence as they had made the whole thing much easier on him. Now however he was slightly nervous. It was his first time home since the day of the Ritual, and he could practically feel the tension in the air. Standing in the foyer waiting for him, was his father James. James Potter was not smiling, instead he had a slightly stern expression on his face. He took in the guards that had followed Harry into the house. They were only temporary until Moody could organise and train a permanent guard force.

"I would appreciate if you try not to interfere in our family life as much as possible." James said to the guards.

"Understood Sir. If you don't mind we would like to inspect the house. We do not know the layout you see." The head guard said professionally.

James nodded his head, and the guards made a bow to Harry before leaving on their inspection. Two of them stayed behind to James's obvious irritation.

Harry and James made their way into the living room, where Chris and Glory were sitting playing exploding snap. A look from James was enough for them to decide to continue their game elsewhere. Both of them left with slightly gleeful expressions, which had Harry more than a bit apprehensive. James turned towards the two remaining guards.

"If you don't mind, I would like to speak to my son in private".

The two guards turned to Harry, who nodded slightly.

"We will be just outside the door Your Majesty".

The two left, and James immediately cast various privacy wards. He then turned and sat in a chair, fixing Harry with a piercing look. Harry sat in a seat in front of him, but he couldn't get comfortable. It had been a long time since Harry had last had James's undivided attention. He found it quite disconcerting.

Eventually James spoke, "The results of that Ritual were unexpected, weren't they"?

Harry snorted at the understatement, and couldn't resist speaking back, "You wouldn't have been surprised if Chris or Glory had been chosen".

"No I wouldn't have." James spoke bluntly, "But the fact remains that they weren't chosen and you were. Now we have to decide what to do about it. I was very disappointed with your decision in the Wizengamot today".

"Why were you disappointed? I acknowledged my own shortcomings and allowed the Ministry to continue as the main power in the country. It was the only sensible thing to do." Harry retorted.

"No! The sensible thing would have been to agree to my proposal. You allowed power to remain in the hands of a corrupt organisation that is run by fools and morons"!

Harry bit his tongue, stopping himself from retaliating to the comment. James mollified by the lack of response visibly cooled. "Well its done now, and we can't very well change it. I've spoken to your mother, it's quite obvious to us, that if you hadn't been born first, Chris would be king. Harry you must understand that Chris would make a better king then you. He is the boy who lived and well, you're just Harry. As such we think it would be best that when you come of age that you announce that you are abdicating the throne...".

"What!" Harry shouted, standing up in shock.

"Now Harry don't act all surprised. You know as well as us that its the best decision. If you're worried about what you will lose don't be. People will always respect you for the fact that you were once king and because you were self sacrificing enough to give up that power in favour of someone who is clearly so much better than you...".

Harry stood stunned.

"...and I'm sure that Chris will allow you to keep several of your attendants and give you several minor titles. How does earl sound?

No it would be much better to make you a Count. Well we can cross that road when we come to it. Of course we'll have to..."

"No." Harry interrupted.

James stopped and looked at Harry, "Excuse me"?

Harry took a deep breath, "I said no".

James, who had been smiling before frowned, "I'm afraid I don't understand. What are you saying no to? Would you rather be a Duke? I'm afraid that might send mixed signals if we..."

"No." Harry interrupted, "I'm saying no to abdicating. I will not give up my throne".

James's frown deepened, "What are you saying Harry? Are you that selfish that you would stubbornly hold onto power that should by rights be someone else's"?

Harry laughed hysterically "By rights that power is mine. I was chosen by magic. Not anyone else, especially not your precious Chris".

James stood angrily, "You will do as your told, young man. It was bad enough that you blatantly disobeyed me in front of the Wizengamot earlier. Things would be so much easier if you would have consented to sharing power, but you're so greedy, selfish, power hungry. You would continue to rule, even knowing that Chris would be King were it not for you usurping his place".

"I will never share my crown with Chris." Harry shouted.

"No! You will abdicate it to Chris as soon as your seventeen." James spat.

"I will never give up my throne to someone who is so unworthy..."

SLAP

Harry reeled back and fell against the wall, clutching his face where James had just moments before slapped him. He looked up staring at his father in mute silence. James stared back at him, white with

shock, his hand still outstretched, as he looked at the red hand shaped mark that was glowing on his sons pale skin. A single tear, eased its way out of the corner of Harrys eye and fell slowly down the contours of his face until it reached his open mouth. James watched the tear drop.

"Harry...I..."

Harry stood up and bolted from the room, leaving James staring after him, a look of complete sorrow on his face.

The sun had set when Harry heard a knock on his bedroom door, he turned from where he was lying on his bed, to see his father peaking his head round the door.

"Can I come in?" He questioned.

Harry shrugged, "Sure".

James opened the door, and stepped into the room. He was holding a jar in his hand, but Harry was staring at the ceiling, refusing to acknowledge him.

"I brought a bruise salve, you know to..." He trailed off, at the sight of the purple and black mark on his face. Harry thought, cynically that he just wanted to hide the evidence.

James ran a hand through his hair, before gesturing awkwardly at the bed, "Can I sit down?" Harry shuffled over a bit, and James sat perched on the edge of the bed. The silence stretched.

"Those are nice posters," he said eventually, pointing at the duelling posters, "when did you get them"?

"Two years ago." Harry replied shortly.

"Oh". James said embarrassed. He looked around the room, searching for something else to say. He zeroed on the pictures of Krum.

"I didn't know you were a Krum fan? Maybe I could take you to a game, I've got a few connections I could..." James trailed off at the incredulous look Harry was giving him.

"Krum, you would know, if you had paid any attention at all to me over the past few years, is my best friend." He spoke acidly, before turning back to ignoring James.

James winced, but he couldn't deny the claims. "I haven't been a very good father to you, have I?" Harry snorted, and rolled over so that his back was to James. James sighed.

"Please Harry, please just, look at me".

Harry didn't turn to face him, but said bitterly "Why should I? You have never looked at me".

"No I haven't. I guess I got so caught up in Chris and Glory, that I forgot that I had three children. It's just they were always so loud, so there, so obviously great, and you were so quiet, that it was easy to forget that I had three children. Too easy to forget. It's not an excuse, nothing can excuse my treatment of you. Its just, I forgot that not all brilliant things are obvious, that sometimes the things that hide are the most magnificent. Today when I hit you," He choked out the words, "I think that I saw you for the first time in a long time, and I realised, that you're just a boy, but more than that. You are my son, a son who is every bit as great as his siblings, although somewhat more shy then them. I have treated you badly for far to long and I guess what I'm trying to say is...I'm sorry".

Harry had turned to face him, when he was speaking, but instead of looking pleased or relieved and forgiving like James had hoped, his face was screwed up with tears and anger.

"Your sorry." He spat, "You think that a mere apology will make up for all the years that I hoped that just once...just once you would look at me the way you look at Chris and Glory. A single kind word, or praise. Just the slightest bit of interest in me. When I was younger I used to dream that you would come to tuck me in at night, or tell me a story. Every night I would lie in bed, as you would go first to Chris's and then to Glory's room, and every night I would wait for you to come to mine, but you would walk right past my door, until eventually I stopped waiting. I stopped waiting for your love".

"I've always loved you, Harry." James insisted, placing a hand on Harry's knee. Harry shrugged it away.

"You have a fine way, of showing it".

"Please Harry" He begged.

"No, just go away! Go back to the children you actually care about"!

"I won't, not without you knowing that I care about you too."James insisted.

"Yeah right, prove it. What's my favourite subject at school? Whose my best friend? My rival? You don't know do you?"Harry wiped away the tears that were treacherously flowing.

"I don't know Harry, please I don't know, and it hurts so much admitting that. I was wrong, but I've changed I want to learn all those things about you. I want to know your favourite food, what games you like, if you've had any girlfriends. I want to be able to spend time with you, and then to brag to all my friends about how great you are, and not because you're king, but because you're Harry. Please, I beg of you, give me a chance. I don't think I'll ever be able to forgive myself if you don't".

"Good." Harry said simply.

"Harry please, I'm so sorry. Please just... Please". James broke down into sobs. Harry looked around the room, before sighing. His eyes softened, and he reached out to hug James. His father stiffened in his arms, before looking into Harrys eyes.

Harry spoke earnestly, "I don't know if I'll be able to forgive you. I do know that I will never forget what you've done to me, but I'm willing to give it a shot, at least if your serious about this".

Harry knew that he was opening himself up to a world of hurt, but he wanted, no needed to know if their was any chance at all of a reconciliation between him and his father. James's face lit up, and he through his arms around Harry speaking into his hair.

"Don't worry Harry I'll prove it you. I'll earn your love".



"Just remember, that I won't give you another chance". Harry's voice was muffled as he spoke into James' shirt.

"You won't have to give me another chance. I won't waste it. I won't make that mistake again".

Harry nodded, still sceptical, before with one last hug, James vanished out the room.

Ministry of Magic; DMLE

Kingsley Shacklebolt was staying late at the ministry. This was not an unusual occurrence. As an Auror Captain, and one of the most capable at that, he was often given the most intense cases. This, coupled with his lack of social life outside the corps meant that he often stayed late nights working on his cases. He was just heading to get a coffee, when he heard a loud crash followed by an exclamation of pain. He turned to see Tonks had managed to somehow knock over one of the shelves in her cubicle. He chuckled at the familiar sight, but then quickly frowned in concern. Tonks had been staying later and later in the ministry over the last few days, and Shacklebolt who considered himself a friend of the clumsy metamorphmagus was getting worried about her.

He quickly went to retrieve two steaming mugs of coffee, before returning. As he approached the cubicle, he could see her hair flashing through several colours as she stared at the mountain of paperwork in front of her. She was clearly engrossed as she didn't look up as he approached.

"Coffee Tonks?" He asked. Tonks jumped, before turning a grateful smile on him.

"You're a life saver Shack." She said as she clasped the cup of coffee in her hands. Shacklebolt perched on the edge of her desk.

"You're here late?" He commented.

"Yeah well, I've got to get this work done. What about you Shack, I mean I know for a fact that you finished that murder investigation earlier today, you can't possibly be that wrapped up in another case already?" She replied.

Shacklebolt sighed slightly, "No, Your right I don't have another case. I've got to attend a disciplinary hearing a bit later. One of my team members got just a little bit wand happy when apprehending someone a few days ago. Turned out that the guy liked little boys just a bit too much. My team member has a kid of his own, so when he found out..." Shacklebolt smirked slightly, "Well lets just say that the guy will always have a bit of a problem playing with children now".

Tonks looked interested, "Which Auror was it"?

"Harling. He's a good Auror, honest and an easy face. I'd hate to lose him".

"So go easy on him Shack. There's far too few good Aurors around. Don't make us loose the ones we know that we can trust".

"True Tonks, true". Tonks turned back to her paperwork with dismay. Shacklebolt tried to get a glimpse of it from where he was sat, but there were secrecy charms on the papers. Shacklebolt raised an eyebrow. "What could Tonks be working on, that required that level of secrecy"? Whatever it was it was clearly getting to her, as Tonks let out a frustrated sigh and pushed the paperwork away from her, and dropped her head into her hands.

"Something bothering you Tonks?" He asked.

"It's just this case, its intense. I don't know if I can handle it." She answered truthfully.

"Anything I can help with?" He asked, and only partially to ease his own curiosity.

Tonks shot him a look, "Don't think I didn't see you try to look at my papers Shack".

At my innocent expression she snorted, before turning away from me and leaning back in her chair. "Honestly Shack I would love the help, but I cant. It's way to dangerous. I trust you but this is probably more than my life is worth to screw up. My God, I'm in over my head Shack, but there's nothing I can do about it. I'm the only one who can do what I'm doing".

"What about your Captain. If your struggling, shouldn't he lighten your load? Your Captains Suthing isn't he? Maybe if I say something to him he'll..."

Tonks interrupted him, "I'm no longer on Suthings team. I'm working directly for the boss now".

"Bones! Your working directly for her. What the hell did you do to get noticed like that?" Shack couldn't quite keep how impressed he was out of his voice. She was after all a Rookie still.

"I'm not really sure Shack, but the Head set me this task. I just really don't think I'm up to it. There is just so much information, and the level of deceit...Its crazy".

"So say something to her, Bones isn't unreasonable. If your struggling she'd rather you say, otherwise you might mess up and that would be the last thing she would want." Shacklebolt reasoned.

"Your right but I don't want to lose this opportunity".

"And I don't want to see you get burnt out".

"Fine, I'll speak to her. I have a meeting with her when she gets back anyway, I'll say something then." Tonks said.

"Where is Bones anyway?" Shacklebolt asked.

"She went to give Moody his commission." Tonks replied offhandedly.

"Mad-Eye's coming back?" Shacklebolt asked surprised.

Tonks looked up at him, "Geeze Shack, where have you been? Moody's been commissioned to head the Kings security, it was announced in the press conference after the Wizengamot meeting today. I can't believe you hadn't heard. Everyone in the departments talking about it. They all want to be in his team. He's an absolute legend".

"Didn't he train you personally"?

"Yes! That's exactly why I don't want to work for him. He is a legend, but he is also a complete bastard and a real task master".

"Glad to hear that I haven't lost my reputation Tonks". Tonks jumped and spilt coffee down her front, "I'm also glad to see that my lessons in constant vigilance clearly paid off".

Tonks turned around to see Moody smirking at her with Bones standing next to him. She gulped "Watcher Mad-Eye I was just...err...".

"Save it Tonks, I couldn't have you on my team anyway, Bonesy tells me your already working for her." He received a slap on the arm for the Bonesy comment, but Tonks swelled with pride as she realised that Moody wanted her on his team. That feeling quickly evaporated however, and she couldn't resist groaning loudly when Moody continued, "That doesn't mean that I don't want to see how much you've forgotten. Meet me in the Training room after your meeting with Bones. I'm gonna teach you constant vigilance, if its the last thing I do".

Tonks gathered up her papers and followed Bones into her office. When she was gone Shacklebolt turned to Moody, "Go easy on her, she's got a lot on her mind at the moment".

Shacklebolt was surprised to see his own worry mirrored on Moody's face, but it was quickly masked, "Don't worry I know exactly what she needs".

Moody walked away, presumably to his own office, leaving Shacklebolt alone with his thoughts.

## Luna's Room

As soon as Luna had returned from the Wizengamot meeting she ran up to her room and began haphazardly throwing things across her room. Occasionally she would place something in an open backpack sat on her bed, but more often than not she would pause to take something out of her backpack. This was because items that she most assuredly did not want with her were sneaking into it, making her packing take up a lot longer than it would have otherwise. One item in particular was being more troublesome then the others.

How it managed to get upstairs she couldn't guess, but even her boundless patience was being tested.

"No Teapot." She scolded, wagging her finger at it, as it struggled to get out of her grip, "I told you, that your not coming with me. I'm not bringing any tea with me so I have no need for a teapot, so stop it".

"Sweetheart?" a voice questioned from the door. Luna looked up from her scolding and smiled widely.

"Hello Daddy." She said as she placed the teapot on her bed.

"What are you doing sweetheart"?

"I'm packing to go Snorkack hunting Daddy. What did you think I was doing"?

Xenophilius frowned and went to the open pack, "Why are you taking this with you? This will be useless for Snorkack hunting." He said, holding up a strange silver object full on knobs and twiddly dials. Luna frowned thoughtfully as she took it from her father, "I could have sworn that I took this out of my pack".

"So when are you going honey"?

"As soon as I'm done packing." Luna answered.

"So soon, I haven't even told you where they might be yet!" He exclaimed.

"I know that Daddy, but I know where they might not be, and that's as good a starting point as any".

Xenophilius nodded at her sense, before clearing his throat and puffing up his chest importantly, "Well darling since this is your first real piece of reporting I've decided to get you a gift...".

Luna smiled happily. She completely agreed with her father, all those murders and politics and society reports were hardly important enough for a reporter of her calibre.

"...this is as you know my favourite trilby, and since no reporter is worth his salt without one, I want you to have it". He took it off and

placed it on Luna's head, where it fell in front of her eyes. She tilted back and smiled, tears brimming in her eyes.

"Oh Daddy. Thank you so much, I'll be the best reporter ever. Thank You." She threw her arms around her Dad in a hug which he returned.

"Yes well just bring me back proof of those Snorkacks, OK Sweetie".

Luna just nodded, and the two of them returned to packing, neither of them noticing the teapot had snuck into her pack again.

Department of Magical Law Enforcement; Ministry of Magic

Madam Bones sat behind her desk as Tonks settled the papers down in front of her.

"Any progress Auror?" She asked without preamble.

"To be honest, not much. The more I find out the less I seem to know, I mean it just goes so deep. I think I'm in over my head, and the worst part is I can't even get help because the people I normally would ask are the ones I'm investigating".

"Well why don't you tell me what you've got so far"?

"All right, the corruption goes deeper then we thought. I think there isn't a single department which hasn't been infiltrated, even the Centaur Liaisons office." She explained.

"Death Eaters?" She questioned.

Tonks shook her head, "No, at least not all of them. This is the strange part, some definitely are You Know Who sympathisers, but others support Chris Potter. There's no pattern to it".

"What about the kidnap attempt"?

"Well Doyle was definitely a Chris Potter supporter, pretty much admitted to it. His motivation was definitely not greed, but I don't think he's quite right in the head. I think his lawyers are going to have him plead insanity and truthfully I don't think their too far off. He attempted to bribe several other Aurors to abandon their posts or

actively help him. A large number of them did, and their names are listed on this form," she handed over a piece of parchment, which Bones glanced at, "I recommend that we don't move against them yet, so as not to compromise the rest of my investigation".

"Recommendation noted Auror, continue please".

"Right, Witteman, Small and Dillon all were bribed as well, but didn't go through with their end. I know in Wittemans case it was due to cowardice and not any sense of duty, I have yet to investigate Small and Dillon, but I suspect that there reasons were not noble either as they didn't come forward with what they knew".

"I'll make a note of that, and keep an eye on them. Good work Tonks, anything else"?

Tonks hesitated slightly, something that Bones noticed, "What is it Tonks"?

"I think that you should get someone else to do this ma'am".

Bones looked at her, "Why? Is there something wrong with the information you have given me"?

"No, its just it's hard. I don't think that I'm coping and..."

Bones held up a hand interrupting her, "I know its hard, and that it's difficult for someone as inexperienced as you, but your the only one who can do it. You're one of the few people on this force that can be trusted without any doubt, and you're the only metamorphmagus on the force as well. We need a court order to use polyjuice and since were investigating the court officials as well, we need to use your unique talent." She explained.

"How can you trust me so undoubtedly, I mean I haven't been in the corps that long?" Tonks questioned.

Bones smiled, "tell me Tonks, why did you join the corps"?

"What do you mean"?

"I mean, what reasons did you have for becoming an Auror. It couldn't have been easy with your family background"?

Tonks pondered the question, "I guess, I always wanted to be an Auror. I was old enough to remember the first war, and remember the fear of it. I remember that I was a target 'cos of my mum, but I also remembered that there were people fighting for me to survive, and even though the war ended that thought stayed with me. I guess I just wanted to be one of those people who defended me as a child".

Amelia nodded at the familiar story, having heard it a number of times before from various people, but stopped as Tonks continued.

"Then I had an even more personal reason for joining the corps..." She trailed off slightly, but Bones gestured for her to elaborate.

"Sirius is my cousin".

"Oh!" Such a simple statement, but it had a world of information about it.

"You wanted to prove that you were different to your family, that your Black name didn't condemn you to the same dark path." Amelia stated.

"No, I wanted to prove him innocent"!

That surprised her, and she said ineloquently "huh"?

"I know it was ten years ago, but I was old enough to remember, and remember him. I don't believe he was capable of such cruelty and treachery. I'm a good judge of character and even then it didn't make sense to me. What made even less sense was that he didn't even get a trial, to prove it".

"Missing the trial was wrong and inexcusable on the part of my predecessor, but you have to admit that the evidence..."

"Was circumstantial at best." Tonks interrupted.

"What are you hoping to achieve?" Bones questioned, genuinely curious.

"I want to get him a trial, and get him out of that hell hole".



"I can't open the case again, unless some new evidence comes to light." Amelia explained.

"I know." Tonks sighed, before standing up suddenly tired, "Can I go, I still have some work to finish, and I have to meet Moody in the training room".

Amelia Bones nodded her assent but as Tonks reached the door she spoke, "You asked me why I trusted you Auror Tonks"?

Tonks turned a questioning look on her, and Bones smiled. "Think back on the conversation we have just had, I think you'll find your answer".

Potter Home; Master Bedroom

It was late at night and Lily Potter was lying in bed waiting for James. It had been a while since they had last slept together and she was eager for some action. She heard footsteps in the corridor and so hurriedly laid down in a sensual position. She had just finished when James entered the room. She could tell immediately that something wasn't right, but she was determined to sleep with James and so decided to cheer him up. James sat on the edge of the bed facing away from her, not even noticing her new nightgown (one that she had brought specially for that night!) and she crawled over to him and started rubbing his shoulders. He sighed.

"Lily, do you think we're bad parents?" he asked. Lily stopped rubbing his back for a moment, before continuing as if the question was unimportant.

"Of course not, both Chris and Glory are wonderful children, who get all the attention and love that they..."

James shrugged out of her hands and walked away from her, "I know that we have raised Chris and Glory well, but what about Harry"?

Lily paused, "What about him"?

James turned towards her, and stared into her eyes. Lily suddenly felt very uncomfortable under the scrutiny and became very aware of how little she was wearing.

"When was the time we looked at him"?

Lily was confused by the question, "James we live with him, we see him all the time".

James shook his head. "I don't mean see him, but look at him, acknowledge him, know him".

"James I don't understand".

James turned away again, and sat at Lily's dressing table staring at himself in the mirror, "Lily, today I did something unforgivable but it made me open my eyes. Lily we may have been good parents towards two of our children, but we haven't been parents at all to the third".

"James what are you talking about, we're wonderful parents".

"But that's just it, we're not! We don't know anything at all about our oldest..."

"Of course we do James." Lily said angrily.

"No we don't, how can we when we've never even given him the time of day." He said with such profound sadness and conviction, ignoring her tone of voice, while he stared unseeing in the mirror.

"James..." Lily spoke but James carried on as if he had never heard her.

"I intend to change that, I'm going to spend some time with my son, and let him know that I do care. I won't forget him again I swear..."

"James." Lily spoke again but went unheeded.

"I'll earn his love and his forgiveness, and maybe eventually I'll begin to forgive myself..."

"I'm sorry James".

This caught James's attention and he half turned in his seat, "What are you talking about Lil..."

"Obliviate"!

There! He spotted it; the golden snitch was fluttering just off the centre of the pitch. Immediately he tightened his legs on the broom and pressed his body as close to the wood as possible, the broom lurched into action. He was speed, pure speed. His dark hair swept behind him, and the wind brought tears to his eyes behind his goggles, but he kept going faster and faster. He dived in amongst the players, who swerved to get out the way in time. Some swore loudly whilst others let out a little whoop. Absently he noted that one player took advantage of the distraction to aim a shot at the goal, although he couldn't see whether it was blocked or not for his eyes never left the snitch as it darted in dizzying motion away from him. But he was closing in, he let go of the broom with one hand, and stretched out as far as he could reach. Just a little further, and his hand went to clasp it...

Only to be knocked out the way by a smaller hand. Krum pulled back in shock just as the whistle went to signal the end of the game. He shook his head. How was he beaten, the guy just came out of nowhere, how did he miss him?

"Good game Krum", the reserve seeker came over to him, smiling victoriously (and not a tad smugly) and still clutching the snitch in his hand. Krum forced the look of shock off his face and offered his congratulation before saying, "Well, Stanislaus do not get too comfortable holding that snitch, it will be a rare occurrence".

Stanislaus just laughed loudly before turning on his broom and swooping to the ground to where the coach was waiting for the team. Viktor followed him, and landed just as the coach was finishing what he was saying.

"...and Branislav don't get distracted by the seekers, your job is to block the quaffle and Kostya here was able to get a goal in because you were too busy watching. What if it had been a deciding score? You are not a spectator so stop acting like one. The game is not over until the snitch is caught, and that goes for all of you, Branislav is not the only guilty one here".

The coach turned to stare at all the players in turn before sighing, "apart from that it was not a bad practice and if you keep it up we'll have no problem in the big game next week. You dismissed, go hit the showers, you all stink like my mothers cooking, yes even you Lenka, in fact you stink worse then the others".

Lenka being the only female on the team was often made the butt of jokes by the coach. Krum turned with the others but the coach halted him.

"Not you Krum, I want a word with you".

The others sent Krum sympathetic looks, as he turned to look at the coach. Coach Kole was a tall man with the kind of build of a person who was formerly athletic, but had let his self go. This did not in anyway stop him from being a very imposing person, and Krum couldn't stop himself from feeling apprehensive as he waited for Kole to speak.

"What is wrong with you Krum? I know your flying in the clouds, but I want your head to be firmly on the ground. You haven't been focused all week and it's affecting your game. Stanislaus is good but there is no way he should have beaten you to the snitch. He's just not of your calibre. If you keep this up I'll have no choice but to ground you for the game next week".

"No Coach," Krum begged, "Don't ground me, I can fly and focus, it's just I have a lot going on at the moment and..."

"I don't care what else you have going on, quidditch should be your priority"!

"It is my priority, but I can't help but think about it." Krum protested.

"You mind telling me what's up then?"Kole said, folding his arms over his chest and glaring beneath bushy eyebrows.

Krum scowled but then his gaze softened and he relented, "I'm worried about Harry..."

Coach Kole interrupted him, "Harry! This is about a boy! Krum I'm probably not the person to be talking to about relationship advice, although I know you're of that age where these things are important. I think Lynch of the Irish team swings that way, maybe I could call him up and you can have a word with him about your boyfr..."

Krum had turned slightly pale and loudly interrupted the Coach waving his arms wildly in protest, "I'm not dating Harry! No! He's my

best friend, Harry Potter. I'm dating Fleur Delacour, she is part Veela".

Kole was now smirking slightly, "Part Veela you say. I remember in my day the Veela couldn't keep their hands off me, and let me tell you boy they are wild in... Wait did you say Harry Potter"?

"Yes".

"As in the boy who is the new King, that Harry Potter"?

"Yeahhhs".

The Coach was now grinning widely, "Do you think he'll be interested in some endorsement deals or something. Maybe something like 'Bulgarian Quidditch team, so great even the King bows to them', or maybe..."

"Coach!" Krum shouted.

"What?" the coach looked up.

Krum glared at him. Kole looked confused before realising what Krum was glaring at.

"Oh! What's the problem then? Why are you worried about him"?

Krum glared some more just for good measure before answering, "I'm just worried about how he's coping. Harry has never been the most confident bloke, and this has to be a huge shock. I've not been able to get in touch with him, because all his mail is being screened, and now he won't even be going back to Beauxbaton in the autumn so who knows when next I'll see him".

"And this is keeping you from focusing, this lack of contact?" The coach looked confused, but Krum nodded in reply.

"Isn't the King having some big party for his birthday on Monday night"?

Krum said, "Yes".

"Are you invited"?

"Well yes, but I can't go because of practice the next day." Krum argued.

"You're excused from practice".

Krum gaped, "what"?

"You're excused from practice. You need to focus and I need you to be in top form for the game next week. That isn't going to happen unless you see the King, so you can go. But..." Coach held up his hand to stop Krum from getting too excited, "I expect you to be with me completely after that. I don't need a player who allows personal problems to get in the way of their work. If you can't do that then I won't have you on my team, no matter how good you are. You understand me krum"?

"Yes sir." Krum said sullenly.

Coach relented slightly with his stern look, "Your good Krum, one of the best in fact and I do understand that this is not a normal situation, but I've invested a lot of time and energy into you. I don't want to see that wasted. On the ground you can do what you like, but in the air you've got to be completely and utterly committed. You have got be able to leave your personal problems on the ground".

"I understand Coach".

Coach Kool smiled, "Good lad. Hit the showers, and think on what I've said. You've got a lot of potential. Don't waste it".

"I won't Coach. Don't worry I won't".

It had been several days since Harry's confrontation with his dad and since then he had not had the chance to say more than two words to him. His time had been scheduled to every second with meetings, press conferences, state dinners and all manner of public events. Too put it lightly Harry was exhausted.

Yet that didn't stop him from feeling a certain level of excitement as he left a grand room within Buckingham palace. Harry had spent the morning in conference with the Queen, where she and her advisors discussed what Harry's position in the muggle world would be. He

could not of course be known as a king because then the people would wonder what he was king of! So instead he was made a Duke in addition to his muggle titles, and a tale was sprung of him been a relative of the Queen who had a minor claim on the throne through a cadet branch of the royal family. True to his word Harry had also brought the Delacours along and after a brief meeting with the Queen, they had left with a member of the royal household to go on a tour of the palace. Later they would meet him at Downing Street for lunch with the Prime Minister which when they were told had Gabrielle squealing for joy.

In the mean time Harry had one more meeting to go too and as he settled into a comfortable seat in the back of a magically enhanced Rolls Royce, he couldn't help but feel his nerves grow as the car set off towards the home of the most important man in Britain.

#### The Village of Manaton: Dartmoor

It was a strange sight that the people of Manaton saw as a young girl ambled into the village with a huge backpack on her shoulders. It wasn't that she was a stranger that had people staring. Indeed they had lots of people come and stay in their village especially during the summer months for which they were rightly proud. No what grabbed peoples attention was just how odd she was.

"Oh, she's a pretty enough girl," said one villager to another, "but just look at her ears. Why, she is wearing radishes in her ears". The villager turned to look and saw that, yes, she was wearing radishes in her ears, and bottle caps around her neck and she was humming slightly off key.

"Hmmm," the villager said, "I see what you mean Mrs. Hardy. I reckon she's not quite right in the head. Or maybe it's some fashion statement, you never know with these youngsters. In any event she's coming towards us now, and I don't think she'd be right pleased to here us gossiping about her, no matter how nutty. Better be quick, you hear".

He was right for seconds later Luna Lovegood approached them with a spring in her step and a smile on her face.

"Good morning." She chirped.



Mrs. Hardy and the villager exchanged looks.

"Err, good morning." They replied.

There was a few moments silence where Luna continued to smile at the two villagers, and they in turn felt increasingly awkward.

"Can we help you?" one of them asked.

"I don't think so." Luna replied, and then continued to smile at them.

Now the two villagers were quite positive that the girl was insane and were wondering how they could make their excuses to leave her alone. However Luna was still staring at them and not wanting to appear rude, they felt inclined to break the silence.

"Then, may we ask what you are doing here".

Luna beamed up at them, "Of course." But she didn't elaborate.

"Well?" Mrs. Hardy asked.

"Well what?" replied Luna.

"Well, what are you doing here?" asked Mrs. Hardy feeling quite exasperated.

"I'm hunting Crumple-Horned Snorkacks".

"Crumble-Thorned Snorwhats?" said the villager, his eyes slightly crossed in confusion.

"Crumple-Horned Snorkacks. I'm following the notes left by the wizard Bowerman who I believe was hunting for the Snorkack. From what I gather he and the witches in his party made a stone replica of Bowerman and his pet dogs in order to lead the Snorkack into a trap. I want to see if they left any clues for my trail." Luna elaborated.

The two villagers were now not only certain that Luna was certifiable, but were also thoroughly confused. However one word did stick out in their mind.

"Bowerman," said Mrs. Hardy, "You wanting to find Bowerman's nose"?

"No. I just told you, I want to find Crumple-Horned Snorkacks." Luna said slowly.

But Mrs. Hardy was clinging onto something familiar, "If you want to find the Snorepacks..."

"Snorkacks." Luna interrupted.

"Right, right Snorkacks," she waved off the interruption. "If you want to find the rock formation all you have to do is go about a mile from Hound Tor. Do you have a map? It will be easier to show you on a map".

Luna nodded and within moments after shuffling through her huge backpack she had her map out and was shown how to get there. Minutes later she left leaving a few confused villagers in her wake.

Mrs. Hardy turned to her friend, "I'm not sure what just happened, but what I do know is that I could do with a nice cuppa. Would you like to join me Mr. Joy"?

Mr. Joy agreed and the two of them both went inside and both decided not to mention the strange girl again.

Number 10 Downing Street

"Go write on in Your Grace, the Prime Minister is expecting you." A serious looking man sitting behind a desk in number 10 Downing Street said to Harry as he walked through the door. Harry nodded wiping his clammy hand on his trouser leg. He took a deep breath and went in. All but one of his guards waited outside.

The first thing that Harry noticed was just how normal the room looked. Harry didn't know what he was expecting, but he thought that it would be quite a bit grander than the normal office that he had walked into. After all he had seen the ostentatious office of the Minister of Magic, but he reflected the utter normality of it all was setting him at ease. Harry supposed that this was quite possibly the point as plenty of people would visit this room for the first time and it wouldn't do for them to be too nervous to get down to business.

The second thing that Harry noticed was the Prime Minister standing behind his desk and holding out a hand for him to shake.

"Welcome Your Majesty," he said as he warmly shook Harry's hand, "It's a pleasure to finally meet the person who is causing such a stir in my counterparts' office".

"A stir sir?" Harry asked as they both sat down.

The Prime Minister smiled widely, "Yes Baldric over there," he said pointing at an oil painting of a frog like man in a silver wig, "reports that Minister Fudge is in quite a tiff. With you around he doesn't know what to do with himself. Of course he didn't know what to do before you were around either but that's beside the point". Baldric chuckled quietly at this and the Prime Minister shot him a knowing grin.

Harry on the other hand was looking at the portrait in confusion and the Prime Minister seemed to notice his confusion for he explained, "Baldric is supposed to keep me updated on wizarding affairs. We have become quite good friends through our mutual dislike of Minister Fudge. How that man got into office is beyond me... but please, forgive me, he is your Minister so I shouldn't be talking about him like that".

"No go on. I quite agree with you." Harry said.

The Prime Minister chuckled but quickly composed himself. "Right," he said shuffling some papers, "as much as I would like to chat all day, I think we should get down to business. I understand that you and the Queen have already agreed upon a cover story for your new status"?

Harry nodded.

"Right then, are you aware then that those positions give you certain rights within the muggle world? For example you now have a seat in the House of Lords and so have a certain influence in the new laws".

"I am aware of that but I will hardly be in a position to take up that responsibility. I will be ruling the wizarding world and that will keep me quite busy." Harry said, but the Prime Minister shook his head.

"You may not choose to take up those responsibilities but that won't change the fact that you will be in the public eye, and from what I have seen of wizards, most are completely ignorant of even the most basic mundane devices. Our cultures are so very different..."

Harry interrupted him, "That's true to a certain extent. Wizards in England are most certainly ignorant as are a great deal in Europe. However my school was quite near a muggle town and the older students were allowed to visit the town provided we could demonstrate that we could pass as muggles." Harry grinned wryly, "As you can imagine most of us jumped at a chance to leave school for a bit, so I can confidently say that I have no problems understanding muggle culture".

"Excellent, although there may still be questions asked about your education and other such things. We will have to cross that bridge when we come to it though".

A look passed suddenly over the Prime Ministers face and he opened his mouth to say something before quickly closing it. He then seemed to change his mind and he opened his mouth again.

"Forgive me, but this may seem rude. But I don't understand why the wizarding world was so eager for a monarch. Don't get me wrong, I like the monarchy and have a lot of respect for it. But in the muggle world self governance and democracy is everything. The monarchy if anything is now seen by a great deal of the public as somewhat an archaic institution. Still good for tourism and it has a somewhat novelty value, but in some matters it is essentially defunct. Yet in the wizarding world it is the opposite. Forgive me but I don't understand it".

Harry thought for a moment. It was a fair point, and he wanted to give the Prime Minister a fair answer. But in truth he didn't feel like he was the best person to explain it. The issue was so vast and complex. Nether the less he gave it a go.

"To start with, have you heard about the last war in the wizarding world"?

The Prime Minister nodded, "it was the one with that Volelenor character, wasn't it"?

Harry choked a little bit at the mispronunciation but continued, "Lord Voldemort yes. Well at the beginning of that war it was essentially the latest stage of an ongoing friction between the two factions of the wizarding world. It of course progressed beyond that point, 'till it was more about a madman than anything else, but still at it's heart it was a war between the Light and the Dark".

"You mean it was a battle between good and evil, like in a story?" the Prime Minister asked a bit incredulously, but Harry shook his head, "No, though some people like to think of it that way, but..."

Harry paused to think of a way to explain it, but he couldn't think of a way that would make sense so he changed his tact.

"Tell me Prime Minister, have you heard the tale of King Arthur".

The Prime Minister looked confused, but nodded his head.

"Well we have that legend too, although it's slightly different for us. I think the best way to explain the wizarding worlds need for a King is through the tale. Would you like to hear it? We have plenty of time"?

The Prime Minister looked intrigued and sat back in his chair, folding his hands in his lap and listened with rapt attention.

Harry began his story...

The legend begins years ago, back when the realms of magic and mundane were not yet separated. The King, a powerful mage called Uther Pendragon, died and left the land without an heir. But on his death bed he spoke a prophecy, his only prophecy. It spoke of a magical sword stuck into a stone, and that whoever pulled the sword out of the stone would be his son, and thus the rightful king. No sooner did the King die, than the sword appeared as he claimed it would, and the people knew that the prophecy was true for the sword was Excalibur, forged by the last of the Great Dragons and blessed by magic. It was the sword of Kings!

Years past and many tried to pull the sword out of the stone. From the highest lord to the poorest peasant any who wished to tried but none succeeded and the people despaired of ever finding peace, for

the land without a King had become lawless and ungoverned. A once united kingdom, split into fiefdoms and warring factions.

A council was formed out of the richest and most powerful men in the land. Knights, Lords, and Wizards convened to try and end the violence in their lands for they too were sick of the anarchy that plagued it. They believed that Uther's prophecy would never come to fruition, and so decided to hold a tournament. He who won the tournament would become the new king.

Envoys were sent and the news spread so that when the time for the tournament arrived hundreds travelled to London to compete.

Amongst them was a Knight and his Squire, Sir Kay and his foster brother Arthur. Kay was new to his position and so would order Arthur around in pointless tasks in order to satisfy himself of his own power. Arthur, who loved Kay deeply, would never complain and would try to do his duty, but often found himself forgetting to do some task or other. Hence it was that on the day of the Tournament Arthur was kept so busy that when they arrived to compete he realised that he had forgotten Kay's sword.

He made haste to the inn where they had lodgings only to find that the inn was locked. The proprietor had gone to see the tournament.

Arthur was desperate for though he was sure that Kay had no chance of winning the tournament (for Kay was not the best dueller in the land and often let his temper get the better of him in a match), it was the first time that Arthur had been trusted to any kind of important position and he was dismayed to let his brother down so dismally.

Thus Arthur went from door to door in order to beg for a sword, but the city was emptied, all having gone to the tournament. Resigned he went to inform Kay of his failure only for a strange sight to catch the corner of his eye.

'What Luck!' Arthur thought to himself, for there in a courtyard was an odd sort of memorial. It was a sword stuck in a stone. Arthur looked around hesitantly, not sure if he should desecrate such a place by taking the sword. But, Arthur reasoned, it wasn't like anyone would notice it was missing and he could place it back after Kay had competed.

His mind made up Arthur rushed to the sword, and with a two handed grip and a great heave Arthur pulled the sword from the stone, thus unknowingly fulfilling the prophecy. Arthur ran full speed towards the tournament, and ran through throngs of people to where Kay was waiting with his father Sir Ector.

"Where have you being?" he asked crossly, "have you got my sword"?

Panting, Arthur handed over the sword he had retrieved.

Kay took one look at it and proclaimed that it was not his sword (for even Kay could see that the sword was too finely made to be his).

Sir Ector leaned over Kay's shoulder to see the sword, and with a gasp (for he recognised it for what it was) said loud enough for all those near to hear, "Why, it's the sword in the stone"!

Silence fell over the assembled knights and nobles and they all turned to look at the three and the sword held in Kay's hands.

Sir Ector turned a stern look on Arthur and spoke clearly "Tell me boy, and be honest, where did you get the sword"?

Arthur, who did not know the significance of what he had done, answered honestly "I got it from a stone in a courtyard".

His answer had the assembly erupt in noise and complaints, for none could believe the boy's tale. Yet the crowd grew quiet when a lord of high rank and power approached the boy. He knelt so that he was looking Arthur in the eye and spoke to him. The words were quiet yet all could hear him.

"Tell me child, do you know what that Sword is"?

Arthur answered that he did not.

"That is Excalibur, Sword of Kings. Now will you answer me in full truthfulness, where did you get the sword"?

Arthur once again gave the same answer. The lord gazed at him solemnly, before saying "I believe you," he held up his hand to

forestall further protest from the crowd, "But I believe that the people may require more proof than your word, would you consent to showing us the stone"?

Arthur nodded and together with the lord, Sir Ector, Sir Kay and all the masses they made their way to the courtyard. There Arthur was made to put the sword into the stone and then pull it out again, but the people protested that the sword had already been pulled out and that was therefore no proof at all. So the kind lord bade others to try, and once again people tugged and pulled at the sword, but to no avail for it was quite stuck, and once again Arthur pulled it out with ease.

Then realising the truth the people knelt before Arthur and proclaimed him King.

At this the Prime Minister interrupted Harry's story, "a terrific tale though it is, I fail to see how it differs greatly from our own versions of the legend"?

Harry smiled grimly, "I'm afraid that the story now diverges quite a lot".

The Prime Minister looked intrigued and Harry continued.

Soon after Arthur being but a child, called for tutors and advisors in all things. Amongst those who arrived came Morganna and Merlin, the most powerful of all mages, made only stronger due to the bond of matrimony between them. Never had there been two people more fated than they. The two knowing the strength of Uther Pendragon, came to be tutors in all things magical to the young king. Yet it was not to be.

It was discovered that though Uther had been a powerful wizard, Arthur had no magical powers of his own. It was found that Uther, ashamed of his son, had ordered him abandoned by a trustworthy servant. Uther had been sure that he would father many more sons and heirs and so had no qualms about abandoning Arthur to his death. It had been but chance that led to Sir Ector finding Arthur and raising him as his own.



The people were outraged at the tale, but more than that, they were concerned for the fate of the Kingdom. For how could a magicless king rule over those with the ability to defy the very fabric of nature?

Arthur too saw the danger of his position and said "I am a King over lands which are entirely mysterious to me".

And Arthur having grown to trust and love the Lord Merlin and Lady Morganna as like to parents, decreed that he would split the lands of magic between them. So the land of Camelot was given to Merlin and the Isle of Avalon to Morganna and he said to them both, "To you I gift the most powerful lands in my domains to rule in trust for me, and under me. Hence forth you shall be my voice in all things magical", and Merlin and Morganna, being the greatest of mages swore loyalty and everlasting fealty to the king.

In time the realms of Avalon and Camelot grew in power and might and became the envy of all other lands of the king. Camelot became a centre of learning and Merlin invited all who would to come and gain what knowledge they could. And out of Camelot sprang Magic of Light, and new creatures were born both great and beautiful, and out sprang the Griffin and the Unicorn, the Snidget and the Bowtruckle and many, many more. And the people could see the goodness in them and grew to love Camelot and Merlin.

Yet in Avalon, magic grew of a different sort. Magics both mysterious and powerful. And Avalon closed its doors to all but a few and cloaked itself in secrecy and darkness. And the people grew afraid of the Isle and its magic for they did not understand it.

And so it came to be that war broke out between Camelot and Avalon, and the magics of both were turned to war and vile act and were both corrupted.

Creatures foul and debase were born, and the land was covered in a black shadow. Merlin and Morganna watched unable to stop the destruction their people wrought. They were kept from each other and wept bitterly at there distance, for though they were opposites in every way, their love for each other had not diminished.

And so they conspired to meet with each other in secret, and they met at night under the stone giants. Their reunion was bitter for they were betrayed, and the sister of Morganna, Morgan Le Fey and the

Sister of Merlin, Nimue imprisoned them in the stone of the giants, and so took the lands of Avalon and Camelot for their own.

And so the war of Avalon and Camelot continued, with Nimue and Morgan Le Fey keeping their alliance secret. Thousands died whilst they reaped the rewards of their betrayal.

The Prime Minister raised his hand in interruption, "Forgive me, but where is Arthur in this? Surely he would not have allowed his land to sink into civil war without even the slightest mention of protest".

Harry smiled slightly, although it did not quite reach his eye, "Patience Prime Minister, that is the next part of a tale that only gets grimmer".

It seemed that nothing was left to oppose the witches in their ambitions. The realms of Camelot and Avalon were locked in a twisted struggle that seemed to have no chance of ending, and with Merlin and Morgana trapped, they were the two most powerful mages in the land.

Yet there was one still with the power to oppose them, for when Merlin and Morgana swore loyalty to Arthur Pendragon, they did not do it as individuals, but as Lord and Lady of their realms, and so when Morgan Le Fey and Nimue took the land and titles for their own, they unknowingly bound themselves to that oath.

Yet they were not without cunning and so even before the war had broken out they had made plans for Arthur and with stunning cruelty they implemented them. They cursed him with a waking death, alive yet like to a wraith, incapable of conscious thought or action. He was reduced to mere existence, he breathed yet only for the air he took into his lungs, he ate but took no enjoyment from that which passed his lips. And so with Arthur out of their way, there was truly none left to oppose them.

Yet unknown to the two traitors there was a cure to Arthur's curse, and as things must be this cure eventually came to light. For told amongst the peasantry was an old tale of an elderly lady who when cursed by an evil warlock had drunk from a golden goblet and was cured of her affliction. And a legend sprung up about this goblet, and people spoke of its power, of its healing properties, its ability to grant wishes, fortune, and the mystique surrounding it grew, until it

became known as the Holy Grail, an object of such greatness that men would spend their entire lives searching for it in vain.

Thus when news of Arthurs curse spread to all corners of the Kingdom, the legend of the Grail once again passed through tongues, and it was whispered in hushed voices and whispers across the land until it reached the ears of one of Arthur's knights. Sir Dagonet, A court jester, who had been knighted by Arthur and proven his worth, heard the tale and conveyed it to the another knights of the table, and they sat in contemplation for many hours until at last Sir Lancelot spoke,

"Well, my good Jester, I do not put much into old tales with no proof but the whispering of old men and gossips, yet it would seem that we are out of options. I put it to all knights to go on this Grail quest, and either to retrieve it or die in the attempt".

But Sir Lamorak said "Truly Lancelot this quest is of the most importance, yet would you leave the city and its King undefended and without rule"?

"Nay," Lancelot said, "As closest in kin to the king, let Sir Mordred rule".

The Prime Minister, who had been sitting, gripped with the tale sat up sharply.

"Mordred!" he gasped.

Harry shushed him and continued on.

But Mordred was not to be trusted for though he was close in kin to the king, he was a wicked man with a black heart. He lusted after power and wealth, and so when all the knights had left he seized control and all were a feared and he revelled in their terror.

He would summon young maidens to his rooms, and there lie in wait for them. He would take them in his arms and kiss milky flesh, and they would stand shivering in fear, and he would whisper in their ears,

"Are you afraid? It is right that you are, but I can be very...gentle".

And then he would take them, and although they would resist and cry out, none were a match for him and none would hear their cries for in secret he had conspired with Morgan Le Fey and Nimue and they had lent him their magic, and bonded with him in a twisted union.

But news of his debased ways spread, and the people revolted, but they were no match for him and his borrowed magic, and they were quickly subdued and placed under his power. He clamped down on their will and seized even their thoughts making them slaves to his every whim, and those that broke free were put to torture, so that their screams would pierce the air. They would feel as if a thousand knives were stabbing them, and many lost their minds to him. Thus even those with the greatest strength of will could not break free of his hold.

Harry broke from his story, "That is the earliest mention and possible origin of the Imperius and Cruciatus Curse. They are without a doubt the blackest of magics, anyone who can use them with any amount of success is beyond redemption," he whispered.

"How come?" the Prime Minister asked.

Harry said one word.

"Hate".

But during this time the Grail quest continued, and the Knights passed many challenges and obstacles in their journeys. As they travelled many a Knight despaired and would have given up completely if not for the oath that they had given to Lancelot. Yet unknowingly the more they despaired the less their chance of success, for it was an ancient magic that had created the goblet, and an even more ancient one that had hidden it away.

But there were some that did not give up hope, amongst them was Sir Galahad son of Lancelot. He travelled with two companions, one Sir Bors and the other Sir Percival son of Lord Pellinore. Pellinore spent his life searching for the Questing Beast, and thus knew the lands better than any other man and he taught all that he knew to his son. Together the three travelled further than any other knight, and braved hardships that none else could have endured, till at last they came to the resting place of the Grail. It was rested in a grove

where fell a fountain of water, and shown in plain sight on a pedestal, but engraved on the pedestal were the words...

If yea suffer a malady that none can cure then take thy chalice from thy pedestal and suffer no consequence for thou action, but rejoice for in drinking from yonder pool thou wilt be cured and endure no more ills, excepting mortal death.

But warning unto those who would take that which is not owed to them for thou wilt be struck down where thy stands and never rise, for thou art a thief of magic.

And Bors, Percival and Galahad deliberated on what to do, for though travel weary and worn, none were so ill as to need to drink from the Grail.

At length Bors spoke, "It is not clear to me that we are in danger if we take the Grail, for though we are not ill, we take it for one who is".

But Percival frowned at him and responded, "If only good Bors that were true, but this magic is strange and we do not know in what manner it will respond. Nay, we must tread carefully lest we die".

But Galahad said, "Yet we have no choice but to proceed, we have given our solemn vow to retrieve the Grail for our king. We cannot wait 'till we fall ill for that could wait until the ends of time, Nay we will have to place our lives in others hands and pray for success. I will take the Goblet and if I should fall, you will deliver it to our good and gracious Lord and restore him to his senses".

Percival sprung to his feet and cried, "Nay my Lord, not you! You are the greatest of us, were it not for you we would not have made it even to the edges of the woods of Camelot. Let me take your place".

But Galahad smiled and said to him, "Nay Percival for you are our guide, and you will be needed to return or else we will wonder for many years before once again finding our King".

"The let me take your place Sir, for I have been of little use on this quest, excepting the small bit of healing that has been necessary at times." Said Bors.

But Galahad smiled and denied him, and in the end he could not be persuaded.

Then he reached out and took the Grail and was struck down by magic. But as he lay dying, a golden light surrounded him and he disappeared and all that was left of him was the Grail.

And Like Galahad commanded they did not wait to mourn and provide proper burial but rather with great sorrow they returned to King Arthur to restore him. Thus they did not see, that in that night Galahad was returned to them in new form. For magic had seen Galahads cause and judged it true, and though not able to reverse the curse she could change it, and so Galahad was transformed into an immortal creature that was doomed to die but be reborn time and time again. And Galahad was gifted with healing powers and great strength, for the might it took to sacrifice himself.

And Galahad became the first of his kind and he was called a Phoenix.

But Galahad was ashamed of his new form and the loss of his humanity and so hid himself away from mankind in the tall places where none could reach and he vowed to never help another again and he became bitter in his loneliness and so in his grief fathered the Augeryeys to match his Phoenix offspring.

And so Galahad was once again changed and he became half fire and half black.

The Prime Minister shook his head, "How very sad, it must have been such a blow".

"Yeah, I mean I know his transformation was seen as a reward, but it was truthfully a double edged one. To in one swoop lose his humanity and his loved ones must have been terrible, but to then live to see the ages pass. I would not have wanted that fate." Harry said.

The Prime Minister agreed, and there was no more needed to be said on that.

When Bors and Percival returned to Arthur and saw all that Mordred had wrought in their absence they were dismayed, and though they

were able to return Arthur to his senses they had no choice but to flee for Mordred was too strong for just the three of them to fight. And so they learned of the treachery of Nimue and Morgan Le Fey and of Mordred and of the imprisonment of the great mages. And so in secret they freed men from Mordreds control and united the realms of light and dark for the people were still loyal to the King first, and they raised an army and marched against the three most foul. And so a great battle was fought, and it was that in the heat of battle Mordred and Arthur came to each other And Arthur seeing his kinsman was overcome with grief and anger for his treason but out of love for his kinsman he begged him to repent and to give up his borrowed magic, but Mordred laughed at Arthur and said,

"Poor Arthur, yea have no knowledge of the power of my sorcery, and thus thou shall die by my hand, and with yea blood spilt I shall be rightful king as I should always have been".

But Arthur said to Mordred, "Thou art a fool and a simpleton if thou thinks that thou shall ever be King. By my Blood I swear whether they be legitimate heir or not, magic shall judge their worthiness to rule".

And because the air was so saturated with magic, Arthurs vow took hold and Mordred enraged attacked Arthur, and Arthur killed Mordred in one fell move but not before gaining a mortal blow. And as he lay dying he commanded that his sword be given back to she who forged it. But before he could die, Arthur was given Drought of Living Death and so his death was delayed and his body was hidden until a cure could be found.

And in the battle Morgan Le Fey and Nimue were losing and so knowing that they were doomed they lay one last trap, a curse and when they were at last slain the curse was unleashed, and so it was that their final revenge proved to be more terrible then anything they did whilst living. For they cursed all men who were knights of the table to a soulless husk, to be less human then the meanest animal, and to thrive in the evil places that they had created.

Thus the war was over and the people of Avalon and Camelot, of Light and Dark saw what evil their prejudice had wrought and vowed to never split their rule again...

"So that's why we need a King. The King is the only one who cannot be prejudiced against Light and Dark for the simple reason that he is equally Light and Dark. He is the only one who understands both sides completely. The wizarding world is divided and the Ministries are forever discriminating against one side or another, not understanding that without both sides magic as we know it today wouldn't exist!" Harry finished heatedly.

The Prime Minister nodded, "I understand but if the wizarding world at least give the appearance of treating both sides as equal, then how come I have only heard wizards refer to the date as the 'year of Merlin'? Surely if they are both held in esteem it should be the year of Merlin and Morganna"?

"You're absolutely right, and in fact it is referred to as that in a sense. From the summer equinox to the winter it is referred to as the Year of Merlin and from winter to summer it is the Year of Morganna, although some will pay homage to Merlin all year long and some to Morganna." Harry explained.

"And this is your history? All of it is true"?

Harry sighed, "I don't know. Some of the events seem a bit farfetched although others seem quite plausible. The idea of the Sword in the Stone for example, the sword could have been tied to the royal bloodline and thus it would have been impossible for anyone else to take out the sword, and yet the moment the sword was taken out the spell keeping it there would have been broken so the idea of taking it out and putting it back in again repeatedly doesn't make any sense magic wise".

Harry rubbed the back of his head, "In any case it was so long ago that it's hard to know the truth of it all. Certainly no one has seen Excalibur at all, or the Holy Grail, or even the soulless knights. Although we know that some of it must be true because some of the places exist.

"What do you mean?" the Prime Minister asked.

"What I mean is that we know exactly where places like Avalon and Camelot are".



"Really? Where?" the Prime Minister asked, leaning forward in excitement.

Harry smirked, "Why Prime Minister, I will be attending one of those places to complete my education in September".

The Prime Minister appeared gobsmacked, "You mean to tell me that...".

"Yes Prime Minister. Hogwarts is Camelot".

He ran into his room, crying with the tears that couldn't be shed. It was without a doubt that all love that his family may or may not have once felt for him was for all in asunder gone. One night and he knew that all platitudes that his father had made were mere lies. It was just that he wanted so much to be loved by them, so very, very much. He was willing to believe the lies. But no more! He couldn't fake it anymore. Could no longer pretend. He would allow the illusion of happiness to drop, and for once be free.

He lay in his bed, staring at the ceiling and wondered of the night that led to his resolution.

Harry got home late from his meeting, lamenting the fact that it had gone over because it meant that he would be late for his own birthday celebrations. He was surprised to find the house completely silent. Not just silent, empty. He turned to one of the guards stationed in the home.

"Where are my family?" he asked.

The guard looked confused, "they have already gone to the celebration my liege. Didn't you know"?

Harry didn't know and felt a slight pang as he realised they had left without him. He quickly squashed that feeling reasoning that there were many perfectly logical explanations for why they would leave. They were arranging the ball and probably wanted to make sure that everything was in place. He would just meet them there.

He hurriedly dressed in appropriate garb before running outside where a ministry car was waiting for him. It quickly took him to the heart of London.

The night had to all appearances gone off without a hitch. The music had been good, the guests friendly, the wine had flowed freely and all seemed to be having a good time. But it was all a mirage for the truth, which was that though the celebration was in honour of two boys, only one had been thought about.

The Savoy Hotel was where the celebration was to happen. Unknown to the muggles who frequented the famous hotel it was actually half magical. Every room was duplicated in exact for its magical counterparts, and it had hosted all manner of events for years. When Harry arrived he was ushered through to a grand ballroom and announced. All turned and offered their respects and congratulations, and Harry was polite and courteous to them all. He did not have the time to search out his friends though for his obligations as a host meant that he had to observe the niceties with all the guests. It was no matter though, for quickly after he arrived, the reception ended and all made their way into a grand room for dinner.

There Harry sat at the head table in the place of honour, with Chris as the other birthday boy at his side. Also at the table in a place of honour was Cornelius Fudge. Noticeably absent from the table was Harry's Seneschals who were placed in a less prestigious position further down. Harry frowned at the odd placings. He was astute enough to notice that he was surrounded by allies of his parents. Although, he thought that with his parents' animosity towards Lucius Malfoy, seating him at the table with them would have led to a very awkward meal. They couldn't then let the light seneschals sit at with them after that. The ramifications would be far too obvious.

Harry laughed out loud as he thought of the excuses he had made.

"Why was I so stupid!" he shouted at the ceiling. It should have been obvious. If he had thought of it at all it would have been obvious. But he had been far too willing to overlook everything and forgive, and what did that get him? Nothing except hurt.

"Good evening Your Majesty. Fabulous celebration isn't it?" Fudge remarked as he stabbed his fork into the first course.

Harry nodded swallowing the food that was in his mouth, "Yes Minister, and you are enjoying yourself"?

"Of course, of course. Why wouldn't I be?" he chewed on his own food for a few moments, "Although it was such a shame that Your Majesty was so late, holding everything up as you did. I hope your not planning on making it a habit".

Harry choked slightly at the barb, but recovered well, "It was of course unfortunate, but I was required at a meeting. You of course know how these things can be." He said raising an eyebrow.

Fudge bristled slightly at the implied comment, "Now see here boy," he hissed under his breath, aware of not drawing attention, "I don't like your tone, and if I were you I would change it. Don't forget that I'm the Minister of Magic and have a lot of public support, and am in control of the Ministry. I can make life very difficult for you".

Harry drew in his breath at the threat and turned to look at his father who was near enough to have heard every word. But James just continued eating and ignored the conversation around him.

Harry turned back to his food and smiled slightly. He said with an air of complete nonchalance, "Yes you're the Minister, but I'm King. That's got to count for something".

Fudge harrumphed and turned to converse with another person at the table.

Thinking back Harry couldn't believe the excuses he had made then for his father. How he couldn't make a scene, maybe they were talking quieter then he had thought and his father just hadn't heard, maybe his father knew that he could handle it and didn't see the need to intervene. But really he could see clearly now, he had heard. He just hadn't cared enough to defend him.

"Harry"!

Harry turned from looking around for his friends. It was after dinner and the dancing had just begun. Chris and Glory had quickly spotted their friends and had gone to them, but Harry had had more difficulty finding his. He ignored the disapproving voices of people who head him being addressed so informally, as he saw who called him from across the room.

"Viktor!" he exclaimed, "What are you doing here? I thought that you couldn't come because of practice".

The two hugged quickly, and Viktor explained his conversation with the Coach. Harry grinned broadly, and took Viktor by the arm and led him over to a table full of drinks and other after dinner refreshments.

"So you were worried about me." He teased.

"Not at all," Krum said gruffly, "just concerned. You weren't answering my post, and knowing you, you've already got into a lot of trouble".

"Not really," Harry shrugged, "I haven't had the chance, and I've been so busy. I haven't had a moment's peace. Anyways have you seen any of my friends? I've been looking for them but I can't seem to find any of them".

Krum looked uncomfortable, "Harry none of your friends are here, except for those who are high enough ranked to get an invitation. Didn't you know"?

Harry was shocked, "What do you mean"?

Krum took a deep breath, "Harry... I don't think they were invited".

Harry reeled back as if struck and said loudly, "what do you mean they weren't invited? Of course they were invited".

Krum noticed that they were drawing attention and pointed that out to Harry. Harry quietened his tone but his eyes still blazed, "Chris and Glory's friends were invited. Why wouldn't mine be"?

Krum searched for a good way to say what he was thinking, but Harry guessed before he could voice his thoughts.

"No! My parents wouldn't do that. They've changed. They love me. I don't believe you"!

"Harry..." Krum began.

"No. There's a valid explanation, the distance was too long. Or they were all busy. Or...or..." Harry thought desperately for a reason, something to excuse his parents' actions.

Krum just sighed and pointed across the room. Harry followed his gaze and saw something that took away all his excuses.

He stared as his father put his arm around Lily's shoulder and laughed at something she said. He watched as the two sent proud smiles towards Chris and Glory who wallowed in their affections. He watched and could see that there was no thought of him. No need for him. They were a complete family without him. Just the four not five of them. The perfect family, the complete family. He swallowed back a lump in his throat and turned back to face Krum. He painted a smile on his face, but inside his heart broke as a thousand knives pierced it and cleaved it in two. He tried to hide his raging emotions, tried to pretend that nothing had happened and Krum let him have that illusion, although he could see the concern in his eyes. Krum didn't leave him alone that night and Harry would be forever grateful for his presence.

Harry continued to gaze at the ceiling and eventually he felt his eyes begin to droop as Morpheus claimed him. But before he fell asleep one phrase stuck in his mind, one phrase resonated through his soul, and haunted his dreams which held pictures of a family that could never be. One phrase.

Never again.

Harry was in another meeting along with the Minister of Magic, his Seneschals, His Garter King at Arms, and several Ministers and Councillors. The meeting was to discuss heredity and appointed titles that had been created during the Kings absence and what steps would be necessary to make them legitimate.

"The problem is your Majesty that several of the hereditary seats have been established for such a long time that we simply have no way of knowing whether they are legitimate hereditary seats, or were created by the ministries of magic." Amos Diggory explained.

Harry nodded, "In any case, I would think it foolish to try and distinguish between those created a thousand years ago, and the more modern ones. Whatever the case, those that have already been established would protest at their removal from their elevated positions, and it would just cause unnecessary problems".

"Agreed, Your Majesty." Lucius cut in, "However you will still need to ratify their appointments, otherwise they will not be considered legitimate now that you are returned".

"What do you suggest then Lucius, because as Lord Amos so clearly points out, it would be highly impractical to sort through a thousand years of lineage"?

"A simple enough solution Sire, simply sign a notice with your Royal Seal that states something to the effect of 'Harry I, by the Grace of Magic, of England, Scotland, Ireland and France and of His other Realms and Territories, Head of all Magical Beings and Defender of Avalon etc. hereby decrees that all those whom, in the absence of a reigning monarch were appointed to high and exalted positions, and all those who are legitimate heirs to those whom were appointed to positions hereditary, shall henceforth be recognised as legitimate holders of their seats of power..."

Harry turned to Percy who was once again acting as Scribe for the meeting, "Did you get that Sir Percy"?

"Yes Your Majesty." Percy said, nodding eagerly and gesturing to the long scroll in front of him, "Shall I have it written up, and have Your Majesty's Seal sent for"?

Harry nodded, but Amos forestalled Percy leaving, "If I may, it may be wise to alter the proclamation somewhat".

"How so?" Harry asked.

"Well Your Majesty, the people would love a chance to witness some Royal Pageantry, especially since you are delaying your coronation until after you finish school. Perhaps if you recognised the most recent appointments in full royal ceremony..."?

"How far back"?

Lucius who had liked the idea ever since Amos first proposed it, (and was feeling slightly annoyed that he hadn't thought of it) answered, "I would suggest the last one hundred years, that would cover the most relevant appointments, and although you will be recognising people from many different countries it won't take more than a day".

The Garter King at Arms chose that moment to speak up, "Your Majesty, from my knowledge, I can say that the Lord Seneschal is right about the amount of time it would take. I believe that it is a very good idea".

Harry thought for a minute before agreeing, "Can you compose a list of all those who have been appointed?" he asked.

"Give me just a few minutes and I will have a complete list for you to peruse at your pleasure".

He spent a few minutes scribbling on a scroll occasionally perusing some ledgers he had in front of him, before he presented the list to Harry. He was done so fast that Harry suspected he already knew the list by heart.

Harry took a few moments scanning the parchment, noting with dismay his parents' appointments on the list. Although he could not oppose their appointments, due to the scandal it would create, he was not happy about having to create them dukes, although he was consoled somewhat by the fact that the Potters were already holders of hereditary seats, and it was merely an increase in nobility rather than the creation of it.

However Harry noticed another addition to the list, and sat up in his chair.

"Why is Chris on this list, as a Knight First Class of the Order of Merlin?" He questioned, knowing that he had not had that title before.

The Garter King at Arms looked up, "It is because of His Royal Highnesses defeat of the Dark Lord Majesty".

Harry frowned "Take him off".

The man gasped, "But Your Majesty...".

"I said take him off"!

"Please Your Majesty, I do not understand..."

"Is my will as King not reason enough? I said take him off the list!" Harry's eyes flashed and the man subsided.

"As you wish Your Majesty".

The room turned silent, and Harry felt the awkwardness that he had created. It was just; he didn't want to make Chris a knight. He didn't deserve it, but he couldn't say that to the room. They needed a reason.

He sighed, "It is my belief that induction into the Order of Merlin is given because of gallant acts in service to the crown and country".

"That is correct Your Majesty." One of the councillors answered confused.

"That is why Chris is not on the list." Harry answered shortly.

"Forgive me, my Lord, but I still don't understand. Isn't his defeat of He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named, an act of service to the crown?" the councillor asked.

"Yes, and if it was purposefully done, I would induct him in to the Order, but he was just a baby when it happened. He could not have been consciously aware of what he was doing, so whilst he is



undoubtedly powerful and possesses a rare gift, he has yet to prove his worthiness of joining our numbers." Harry explained.

"But Your Majesty, Dumbledore said that he was able to do it because he wanted to save your life." The councillor protested.

"Mere speculation." Harry dismissed.

"Please reconsider your Majesty".

"I have spoken my mind, and it will be followed".

The councillor finally backed down and nodded his head.

"Yes Your Majesty".

"To all Lords, Ladies and others here present, let it be known that Albus Dumbledore, the right honourable Lord Headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, Chief Warlock, Supreme Mugwump of the International Confederation of Wizards, is by the order of His Majesty the King, today reaffirmed as a Knight of the Order of Merlin." The Garter King at Arms announced in a loud and clear voice.

The room was filled to the brim, crowds of people lining every wall. All were dressed in their finest clothing. Silks and velvets and great jewels adorned every body, and the rustle of fabric could be heard as it brushed against its neighbours as the people squirmed to see the dais.

The hall itself was a magnificent room, long and vast with a grand ceiling. Great tapestries, depicting battles and important events fell against the sides, and tall pillars, hung with flags lined a red carpet that led to a raised platform.

There sitting in all his royal glory was Harry, surrounded by attendants and an honour guard of twelve men, all dressed in royal livery. Harry himself was dressed in deep robes of purple, trimmed with gold and all artefacts of his state were on him.

Harry rose from his seat, and went towards Dumbledore who was kneeling before him. A groom assigned for the occasion, approached Harry holding a long sword on a velvet cushion. Harry

held the sword in both hands and touched the flat side to each shoulder. He then kissed Dumbledore ceremoniously on the top of his head, and raised him to an upright position.

"Rise and be recognised, Sir Albus." He said turning Dumbledore to face the cheering crowd.

The ceremony itself was filled with all the grandeur that could be expected. Harry spent a lot of time sitting on his throne, as he waited for people to approach him. He was increasingly wary of having to constantly stand and sit down again, (of course he couldn't remain standing as he waited as that would be unseemly). Most people he didn't know and it was therefore very tedious to have to constantly acknowledge them, and depending on the ceremony, kiss them on the cheek or top of the head.

It had also been very hard to remember the correct procedure for each recipient and Harry was constantly worried that he would slip up and his mistake would be published in every newspaper for all to see. He had been worried from the start when the very first man to be announced had been made a Knight of the Goblet (second class). This was an incredibly complicated ceremony, and thankfully a very rare one. There were only ten members in total, including that man. After knighting the man and kissing him on both cheeks, the two had to drink from a goblet containing Harry's tears. This was to symbolise both the purity of the art, the bitterness of the suffering of those afflicted, and the phoenix tears of healing. Unfortunately Harry was not able to cry on command and so prior to the ceremony, he had been subjected to a crying curse. It was a mildly painful spell as it literally felt like someone was squeezing the tears out, but it was also very effective.

There were other knightly orders as well, each with their own traditions to be carried out. On top of that there were also the creation of Lords and Ladies to be considered. Each different rank had its own slightly altered ceremony, and there were many different ranks. There were Barons and Baronets, Viscounts, Counts, Earls, Marquis, Dukes, Archdukes, and many, many more, because of course Harry wasn't just the King of England, but of the whole magical world, and they had their own hierarchy of nobility.

Thankfully nothing too bad had happened so far, and since the ceremony had been going on for several hours, Harry was growing increasingly confident.

The Garter King at Arms cleared his throat and said, "To all Lords, Ladies and others here present, let it be known that Chris, the right high, right excellent and noble Prince of Magic, the most dear and entirely beloved brother of our dread and gracious sovereign lord, King Harry the First, is by order of His Majesty the King, today created Knight of the Order of Merlin first class".

Harry sat up in his chair. Surely he had misheard, he thought he said...

But he looked across the hall, and there approaching was Chris in all his smug glory. He walked the full length of the carpet. When he was ten steps away he bowed at the waist. He then continued several more steps and knelt before Harry.

Harry watched him approach in shock. Chris's name was called. The Garter King at Arms had disobeyed him! Chris was approaching and...and... he was trapped! He had no choice but to knight Chris or else risk the public's wrath. The public loved Chris Potter! They would want to see him recognised, and if Harry refused in such a public way, they would want to know why. His home life would come under scrutiny. The people would find out and Harry would be humiliated. His home wasn't great, but he didn't want anyone to know about it. He could deal with it himself.

More than that though. The public would think him ungrateful for not wanting to recognise his brother, especially after Dumbledore had made the press conference announcing that it was only because he was trying to save his King that he was able to defeat Voldemort. Harry scoffed inwardly, as if that was even possible that a baby could be that consciously aware. Certainly Chris had never shown any instinctual deference to him as they were growing up, quite opposite in fact.

Harry stood up, and took the offered sword. He raised it high, (and considered how easy it would be to strike Chris down in that second, before dismissing those murderous thoughts), he hesitated. Just for an unnoticeable second he hesitated, but then resigned he knighted Chris.

After all he had no choice.

After he was seated again, he knighted two more people, but his anger at the situation was growing inside of him. He beckoned over Lucius and whispered in his ear.

"I need a break; I need to think about what to do about this treachery."

Lucius nodded grimly, and addressed the crowd.

"We will now be taking a short recess. You will find refreshments in one of the adjacent halls, please make your way in an orderly fashion."

Harry was already standing, and he walked out the hall, keeping a polite smile on his face and the people cleared a path for him.

"Leave us." He said to the attendants who quickly obeyed his orders, leaving him alone but for his Seneschals and Herald. As soon as he was in a more private setting, he let loose his tightly controlled emotions and allowed his anger to show.

"How dare he?" he shouted, and a burst of magic shattered a glass window. Lucius quickly waved his wand and the glass repaired itself. Harry took a few calming breaths.

"I want him dismissed from his position."

Amos spoke up, "Whilst I deplore his actions, I am not sure if that is wise. No one else in the land has as much knowledge as he does on the proper policies and procedures to do with ennoblement. Also no one has as much knowledge on lineage as he does".

"And yet, he has proven himself utterly untrustworthy and treasonous. He not only disobeyed my direct command, but forced me into a situation against my will. He cannot be allowed to continue as my Garter King at Arms, or else I risk future acts of defiance. He has proven himself to be no true servant of mine!" Harry snapped.

"Agreed," the Herald cut in, "I will inform the Chamberlain that he is to be dismissed, and have him find a replacement. The replacement

may not be as knowledgeable but we will make sure that he is more trustworthy."

Lucius sneered, "Whilst that is the best solution to that problem. It is of no use now; the whole purpose of the event is ruined. The focus will no longer be on the Monarchy, or on the people recognised, but now it will all be about Chris Potter."

"Well we can't change that now, can we? The best we can do is ensure that this never happens again." Arthur replied to Lucius, and the two glared at each other. Allies though they may be, they would never like each other.

Harry who had been silent during the exchange suddenly had an idea, "What if we can make it not about Chris? What if we do something unexpected, something that will draw peoples attention, something so memorable that it will eclipse Chris's triumph and make it no more then a footnote on the page of the day?"

The men exchanged glances, "What are you thinking My Lord".

Harry explained his idea and the men exchanged dubious looks.

"It's a good idea Your Majesty, but it will be difficult to arrange." Lucius said.

"Can you do it?" Harry asked insistently.

Lucius nodded his head slowly.

"Then I order you to make it happen. Go and obey my commands." Harry said.

Lucius bowed and left the room to carry out his orders. It would be tight but he was confident that he could pull it off.

Harry left the room, his attendants falling into step behind him, and made his way to the bathroom. He was still angry at the whole matter, and the constant presence of people only served to aggravate that anger, but he was determined to ignore them.

He splashed his face with water, and scrutinised his slightly reddened face, aware of the eyes that followed his every movement. He then moved towards the stall.

To his surprise one of his attendants made to follow him inside. Harry whirled on him.

"What are you doing?"

The man cleared his throat and puffed out his chest pompously, he spoke in a distinctive German accent. "I am attending du, Kaiser Harry".

"In what capacity?" Harry asked, already dreading the answer.

"I am der Groom of de Stool." He said full of self importance.

Harry became even more angry, annoyed that none of his orders seemed to be carried out, but he cooled his temper to respond.

"You're dismissed".

"Wass?" the Groom asked confused.

"Your services will not be required." Harry elaborated.

"But Sire." He protested.

Harry exploded, "Do you not think me capable of wiping my own arse." Harry heard a cough of disguised laughter but ignored it, "I will not repeat myself you are dismissed."

The Groom opened his mouth to argue some more, but Harry narrowed his eyes into a fierce glare. The Groom turned around in a huff and stormed out the room, not even bothering to bow in Harry's direction. Harry couldn't have been more pleased as he turned to do his business.

When he emerged it was to his Heralds slight disapproving look.

"That was delicately handled My Lord."

Harry turned a withering glare on him, "I ordered the position scrapped. Why are my orders suddenly up for debate?"

"Not debate Sire. The situation is a difficult one. Your Chamberlain is having to handle a bit of a diplomatic nightmare. Each country has to be represented in your staff, and each country is vying to have more positions than the other countries and each one wants the most prestigious positions. The Groom of the Stool, allows the holder of the position to have very intimate access to the King. He would be alone with Your Majesty more than anyone else and as such would have a degree of influence with you. The Germans sacrificed quite a lot of staff positions to have one of them as your Groom of the Stool. The Chamberlain was trying to handle the situation without offending the Germans."

Harry frowned, "it should have been handled before I was put in that situation then. I ordered the position gone weeks ago".

Robert nodded in agreement, "Perhaps yes, but I'm afraid that Your Majesty may have created a diplomatic incident."

Harry groaned loudly. Another problem to deal with was just what he needed.

"Find someone to appease them. I've got enough problems to deal with right now. Anyway the ceremony should really resume soon, or else we will be here all night."

"Right you are Your Majesty. Right You are."

The day was drawing to a close, and the last scheduled man on the list had just been created a Baron. The crowd had erupted into noise as the Garter King at Arms rolled up his scroll signifying the end of the proceedings. Harry glanced towards Lucius and received a confirmation nod in return. Everything had been arranged.

A clear trumpet sounded, drawing everyone's attention, and Harry stood up. Everyone grew quiet and attentive as Harry spoke.

"My Lords, Ladies and all others who are gathered today on this momentous occasion, we are all here to honour those who have proven themselves worthy of the highest esteem. Those who are recognised by all to be worthy of the utmost respect and thus

deserved to be recognised with all the glory that we are able to bestow upon them. Let us all rejoice in the knowledge that today we are amongst the greatest of all yet living."

He paused, allowing for a well of cheers to follow his proclamation, but then held up his hand to allow him to continue.

"However it has occurred to me that though today we reaffirmed the awards of those still alive, those who gave their lives did not receive similar recognition. My Lords this is an unjust thing, and so I have rectified it. Today we will also honour the valiant dead."

Silence followed his words, and Harry gestured to Lucius, who held out a new scroll to the gob smacked Garter King at Arms.

The man wordlessly took the scroll, and Harry resumed his seat. After a moments silence the man began to read.

"For the courageous acts of defending twelve children from the forces of...

Harry looked across the room, taking note of the solemn and proud faces, and knew that he had done the right thing. This action would be remembered, talked about and those who had been the greatest of men and women would receive the recognition that they truly deserved.

Harry stared around his room, bored out of his mind. For the first time in weeks he had a moment to himself, but he found that having nothing to do was even more tedious then the countless meetings he had attended.

He needed to get out and do something, but every time he stepped out into public he was accosted by reporters, and was always reminded of his status as King. People constantly did him courtesy and treated him with an awe that was beginning to get annoying. He was sick of it. He hated that he couldn't go out into public without been recognised. He wanted to be normal!

That was it, he made up his mind. He stalked over to his wardrobe. His closet had been augmented to such an extent since becoming King, and it was filled with all the richest materials and the most



fashionable styles. But Harry didn't want that. He searched right into the back of it and finally found what he was looking for.

"Aha!" he exclaimed as he pulled it free.

It was a plain brown, day robe made of plain cotton with a matching wizard's hat. All in all it was entirely inconspicuous and was exactly what Harry wanted. He hurriedly exchanged his elaborate clothing for the outfit, and pulled the hat down low on his head. He glanced at himself in the mirror. Perfect! He looked utterly normal. No one would give him a second glance. This was brilliant.

He walked out the room, ignoring the odd looks the guards gave him at his change in attire. He made his way to the front door and there hit a snag in his plan. The guards made to follow him.

"I wish to go out alone." Harry said to them.

The head guard said worriedly, "That's not possible Your Majesty. It wouldn't be safe for you to go out unprotected."

Harry tried again, "I order you to not attend me."

The guard wearily shook his head, "If you do that, then we will just happen to be going to the same place as you on our own accord."

"Do my orders mean nothing?" Harry said heatedly.

"They mean everything, except in matters of your safety. We would do everything to keep you safe." The guard explained.

Harry sighed. He appreciated the sentiment, he really did, and was actually quite touched by the display of loyalty, but he needed to get some space. He said as much to the guard, who appeared to contemplate something.

"Perhaps My Lord there is a solution. We do not necessarily have to be visible. Some of us could be disillusioned and others disguised as regular members of the public. That way Your Majesty may get the anonymity that you wish for, but we will still be there if we are needed."

Harry could see the logic of the plan and so agreed to it. He knew that he wouldn't be able to go out the way he wished in any other way.

Harry was having a great time. No one had recognised him, and no one had treated him any differently to a normal person. One store owner had even been rude! True to their words the guards had stayed out of sight, and hadn't even reacted when Harry had received a few comments about his scruffy appearance (because of course, the robes weren't just plain, but also rather old and threadbare).

Harry smiled broadly as he browsed the shelf of Flourish and Blotts. He was looking happily at all the titles in the duelling section when someone collided into the side of him, sending him sprawling to the floor and knocking his hat off his head.

He quickly grabbed it and pulled it on again, and glanced over to the other boy who was staring wide eyed at him. He opened his mouth to say something, and Harry quickly covered it with his hand, before dragging him over to a deserted corner, thankful that no one else had seen the commotion. The shop was miraculously empty for that time of day.

Harry removed his hand from the boys mouth, "Wow, You're the King!" he exclaimed excitedly.

Harry quickly shushed him, "Yes, and I would appreciate you not spreading that news around." He hissed.

The boy nodded violently, "Yes My Lord, but where are your guards. Did you sneak out?"

"No they are right here." A voice said from behind them, and both boys whirled to stare at the man. Harry recovered the quickest.

"I thought you were to remain hidden?"

"Yes, until your position was compromised." he said.

Harry scoffed, "Compromised, its one boy!"

"Yes, and I'm just going to make sure that the boy knows to keep his mouth shut." He turned an imposing glare on the boy who turned to stare at Harry.

"I won't tell anyone, I promise Your Majesty. Honest!"

"I believe him, you can go back to your post." Harry said.

The guard sent one last glare towards the boy, before once again disillusioning himself. The boy looked like he was about to wet himself, as he thrust his hand out towards Harry.

"I'm Colin Creevey, and it's such an honour to meet you Your Majesty. Dennis will be so jealous when he hears, he was grounded so he couldn't come otherwise he would have met you too."

Harry warily extracted his hand, "I sincerely hope that he doesn't find out Mr. Creevey."

Colin seemed to realise what he said because he hurriedly said, "Oh right, right! I would never betray Your Majesty's confidence like that."

"Right, well I need to be going" he said hurrying towards the exit, and into the sunlight, but Colin followed.

"Please, if I could just have a picture. It's only, I'm a bit of a photographer, and it would be such an honour to have a photo of Your Majesty. Of course with that hat no one but me would realise it's you but..." Colin trailed off as Harry turned an incredulous look at him.

"You want a photo?"

"And an autograph, if it pleases you?" Colin elaborated.

Harry was about to tell him exactly what he thought of that request, when a sudden chill took him. He shivered violently and looked around. The sky was clouding fast, far faster than natural and a low mist was hanging on the ground. He shivered violently, as the cold seeped into his skin and bones.

He glanced at Colin, but one look informed him that he too felt the change in the weather and the strangeness of it.

Suddenly the two boys found them surrounded by guards.

"Quickly, into the store." The guard ordered him. Colin quickly did as ordered but Harry resisted.

"What's going on?" Harry demanded.

"No time. Get inside now!"

But it was too late, out of nowhere a group of dementors glided in. Customers screamed and some fainted dead away. A feeling of dread and despair entered Harry and it was all consuming. The dementors ignored all the other people and headed straight towards the King.

"Patronus now men!" the head guard commanded, and at once shouts of "Expecto Patronum!" were heard, but all they managed was a thin, silver whisp which the dementors swiped away before continuing onwards.

Several guards collapsed onto the ground unable to keep up the onslaught, and the others put themselves between the dementor and Harry. But the two swooped in on the guards and some more fainted dead away, whilst two more were kissed and became soulless husks, and Harry was defenceless, and he could hear someone screaming, and the dementor was approaching, and Harry tried to repel them, but it was getting so difficult and one was lowering it's hood and Harry caught a glimpse of a hole on scabbed skin, and Harry was fainting, and as he lost consciousness he saw a flash of terrific, white light.

Harry came to, to the sight of chaos in the streets as medi-wizards and aurors ran around trying to help those they could and find out what they could. Harry groaned loudly, as the noise assaulted his aching head. He could hear a shout from nearby.

"We've got a live one here, and need assistance."

Seconds later, a pair of hands was helping him sit up, and stuffing a piece of chocolate into his mouth. It instantly made him feel better, as warmth spread throughout him, although his head still felt like someone was hammering between his eyes.

"Does anything hurt?" The man asked. Harry tried to focus on him, but found that he couldn't see clearly. He nodded.

"My head is killing me." he rasped.

The man hemmed, "I see, I think you probably hit your head when you fell. I'll need to have a look at that."

Before Harry could stop him, the man had reached out and took the hat from his head; a gasp of shock was heard.

"Your...Your...Your..." he stuttered. Suddenly he seemed to remember himself and shouted out loud enough to be heard.

"Aurors to me, to me."

His cry caught the attention of everyone who turned to see what had caused such a reaction. Immediately Harry was surrounded by men and everyone was asking questions and Harry was getting increasingly confused and his head was pounding louder and louder.

"Silence." a voice said commandingly, and out of the crowd of men stepped Kingsley Shacklebolt.

He knelt down to eye level with Harry and asked him slowly and gently, "Your Majesty. I understand that you are hurt, and require medical assistance, but I need to ask you some questions. Where are your guards?"

Harry gestured to the bodies some alive, some soulless around him. Shacklebolt sighed, "Did you notice anything about the dementors, anything that stood out to you".

Despite the blinding headache he looked directly at Kingsley and said clearly so that all could hear his words, "They headed straight towards me. Someone told them that I was here. Someone tried to kill me."

Complete and utter silence met his words.

## Assassination Attempt!

Proclaimed a bold headline, designed to attract attention, almost as much as the (for once) still photograph in black and white of the King slumped forward, unconscious on the ground. Without the movement in the picture he looked dead, which was of course the point. All across magical England, stands were rapidly selling this attention grabbing special addition of the most read newspaper in the country. At home, those with a subscription were surprised to see an owl with an evening paper.

One such person was not surprised to see a paper, but the content in it were another matter. Her chubby fists crumpled the paper as she grabbed it tightly, reading the provocative article.

A daring attack on His Majesty, The King was carried out earlier today as a swarm of Dementors swooped down on the unprotected people of Diagon Alley. Several people doing their every day shopping were kissed, although the exact number has yet to be tallied.

Amongst the attacked was the King. According to eye witness accounts, the Dementors headed straight towards His Majesty. The King was very nearly kissed, but thankfully the Dementors were repelled by several members of the Dark Lord Defence League who had been attending a seminar within Daering Alley.

The Aurors on scene and the Ministry of Magic have yet to give an official statement, but several junior officials have expressed concern. This reporter finds herself echoing this feeling and finds herself asking some alarming questions.

Have the Ministry lost control of the Dementors? Why have they covered this up so long? Are they merely a band of rogues? Or is the Ministry conspiring against the King? Who sent the Dementors? Most alarming of all, how did they know that the King was there?

The King, it has been reported, was travelling incognito at the time of the attack on an unscheduled trip. Someone had to have betrayed the King, or else His Majesty was merely a spur of the moment target, and that the original target was something else entirely. This reporter has uncovered that Diagon Alley was the host to several muggle born children receiving orientation into our world. Thankfully

none of their lives were lost, although whether they will remain in our world now seems unlikely.

Amongst the notable fatalities was Professor Augustus Wormwood, whose pioneering work towards the treatment of many childhood ailments...

The figure reading crumpled the newspaper in disgust and threw it to the side. All that money wasted on that damned venture. She should have used the intelligence to spread some slander or find a weakness. Her source had been good, no, excellent and everyone has secrets. She would have found something. Perhaps she could have even used blackmail if the information had been juicy enough. She had used it before, and rather liked the idea of being the power behind the throne, but no, she had been too hasty and wasted her chance on this foolish attempt.

At least her source was now dead, killed to make it look like an accident. She had had to use disgusting muggle methods of course, but those couldn't be traced back to her. She had been careful. Nothing could be traced back to her. Still...

She moved into the kitchen, a white room adorned with silent, moving pictures of kittens. She drew her wand and tapped the frame of one of the pictures. Sound came to life and the mewling of kittens rose up in a cacophony of noise until it came together in a high pitched, piercing wail.

She poured herself a cup of tea and breathed in the steam, relaxing at once. Her agitated state calmed. The sound of her victims always did soothe her. Too bad she couldn't have added one more half-breed to the ranks, especially one who was foolish enough to draw her ire. She would show him. Yes, Madam Umbridge thought, she would show him.

Minister Renard of the département d'éducation of the ministère de magie was sitting at his desk when the fireplace burst to life.

"Renard, open your fireplace. I wish to speak to you at once!"

Renard rather suspected that she wished to more than speak, and really didn't want to deal with her anger, especially when he knew it was partially justified. He bent over to stick his head in the fireplace

and said, "Really Madame, I am rather busy at the moment. I will have my secretary schedule an appointment..."

"No!" she interrupted. "We will speak of this outrage now."

He sighed and looked at his wall clock, a cuckoo that chose that moment to go off mockingly.

"Oh, very well. I'll let you through."

He stepped back and turned the ornamental head on his desk counter clockwise. The ornamental head which had previously been sleeping let out a big yawn of protest, automatically letting down the security that blocked the floor as it did so. Seconds later the fireplace grew in size, so that it reached the ceiling of the office and out stepped Madame Maxime. As sophisticated a woman as always, she none the less looked furious. Were Renard not so sure of the woman's sense of discipline he would have been terrified. Still there was something scary about an angry half-giant, no matter how sensible.

"Have a seat Madame, and why don't you tell me what is bothering you?"

Madame Maxime sat down in a chair which automatically grew to accommodate her size and said haughtily, "Like you do not know already, Monsieur."

He did know, but he was hardly going to admit to that fact.

"Why don't you enlighten me?"

She raised an eyebrow and crossed her arms over her chest, "The Twiwizard Tournament!"

"And what is your exact problem with it?"

"That it is happening!"

Renard shifted uncomfortably under her withering glare, but stood firm, "and why is that a problem?"



Her glare intensified, "several reasons, firstly it was decided after the events of the world cup last year that in this current climate it is too dangerous to hold the tournament."

"Madame, we have been assured that the unfortunate circumstances of the world cup were but a one off occurrence and that our students will be perfectly safe." He tried to placate.

She huffed, "You believe that as well as I monsieur, but I digress, my second point. It was decided that to disrupt a whole year worth of study for only three students to take part in just three tasks was completely unreasonable."

"This," he explained, "is why we have reformatted what will be included in the tournament to include more than just the three champions and their tasks."

She pointed her finger at him, a somewhat rude action for so proper a lady. "That brings me to my third point. The champions' tasks are far too dangerous for students."

"Madame, you understand that the safety of the students is my absolute priority. They will be protected."

"It seems to me that prestige and publicity are your priorities."

Renard who until that moment had been calmly facing the woman's anger whitened and said coolly, "That was uncalled for, or do you forget that my son is currently a seventh year at your establishment. There is no doubt in my mind that he will enter and if he is chosen..."

Maxime wilted, "My apologies, it seems I let my frustration get the better of me."

Renard relaxed, "Apology accepted. Now would you care to tell me the real reason for your anger, rather than these half hearted excuses?"

Madame Maxime nodded, "Harry, sorry, His Majesty...I said yes to him leaving Beauxbatons, even promoted it because I thought he would be safer at Hogwarts. But now with the tournament, I find that the very reason he would be better off away from Beauxbatons has gone to Hogwarts."

Renard sighed, "We couldn't have stopped him going to Hogwarts regardless."

"What do you mean?" She asked in confusion.

Renard opened his mouth, and then closed it quickly before opening it again. It was time that Maxime was let in on a little secret.

"Do you remember when I first told you that you had a new applicant to Beauxbatons? You were quite flustered if I recall, because it was only two days before term was due to start."

She laughed a little, "Of course, I remember. It was quite an annoyance having to fit him into the roster and make sleeping arrangements. Not to mention getting his booklist to him. Of course I didn't regret accepting him. Such a bright, promising child and such a surprise he decided not to go to Hogwarts."

"He didn't."

"Didn't what?"

Renard breathed deeply, and unconsciously began to twirl his moustache, a nervous habit of his. "He didn't decide to not go to Hogwarts. He was down on their records from the day he was born, but he didn't get an opportunity to go. He never received a letter."

"Pardon?" said Maxime, aghast.

"Oh, one was sent out." He explained, "But for some reason or other, it never got to his hands. Maybe it got lost, maybe interrupted, who knows? But the fact remains that without a written or verbal invitation the spell activating his placement at Hogwarts was never put into effect."

Understanding was dawning on Maxime, "so when Dumbledore offered him a place at Hogwarts during the Wizengamot meeting, because the King was already on their rosters, his placement at Hogwarts became affixed. The Wizengamot meeting was merely an opportunity to present that offering, all that discussion was merely a formality, because in fact by being on the list, having being placed there by his guardians and those responsible for his welfare, he had

essentially given consent to go there, and so unconsciously entered into a contract."

"Exactly." said Renard.

Maxime frowned, "But children have refused entrance into Hogwarts before with no consequence, having decided later on to go to another school or get private tutoring."

"Yes that is true. The Headmaster of the school, has the ability to release the student from the contract, it's how they can expel students..." he trailed off, an awkward silence filling the gap.

Madame Maxime filled it grimly, "You didn't think he would give that permission." She stated.

Renard shook his head, "I didn't want to take the risk. The Headmaster is an admirable man, even honourable I would say but... no matter how admirable, I would not trust any man with the Kings magic, unless they be oath sworn to him. If that means sending him to another school, in another country then so be it."

They mulled over this in quiet contemplation for a minute before Maxime said, "Just one thing I don't understand. When the King didn't receive a letter, how come they didn't send another?"

The Minister smirked, "A paperwork error on their part. You see, they received an acceptance letter from one Potter child and just assumed that the other had accepted. I suppose that the Potters must have thought their eldest child a squib." They shared a laugh at that hugely false presumption, "In any event, they only realised their error when the start of term began and only one child was at the feast. Rather than admit to their mistake, and really it was too late to make arrangements for him, they contacted me and convinced me to have the King attend Beauxbatons. We got a powerful student, from an influential family out of it and they didn't lose any face. We saw it as a win, win situation."

"Only now, we and Harry have lost, because Dumbledore saw fit to offer a verbal invitation." She finished wryly.

"Indeed."

Maxime had a sudden thought, "Just who was it that decided to have the tournament again?"

Renard's smile was answer enough.

"Why?" she asked, bewildered.

"Because...I rather like the boy, and I have no wish to see his potential squandered by the Wizards at Hogwarts. As good a school as it is, they don't have half the classes that a Wizard like the King needs. Plus..." Renard smirked slyly, "I think the students were growing rather attached to each other, and I think the opportunity to see each other just couldn't be wasted."

"And you wanted to show off Beauxbatons as a school as well." observed Maxime.

"Perhaps."

"So it was about the publicity after all."

They both laughed.

Harry was sitting in the Ministry of Magic. Strictly speaking he was in an interrogation room, although the fact that it was Harry in there prevented anyone from naming it as such. Still the Dicto Quill on the table and the plain walls devoid of any ornamentation (Harry didn't know that they were left unadorned because they were in fact, two-way walls) were a bit of a give away. There was even a chair with chains attached, and those clinked ominously every few minutes. At least the men had the sense to not make him sit in it, and instead had retrieved another chair, although it was worn out and was in bad need of reupholstering. At least it was comfortable, Harry thought, although the long hours he had been sat in it, made even that debateable.

He had been ushered in almost immediately after being checked out by the healers on scene. He had been given a blanket to wrap around himself in an effort to warm him. It was fluffy pink, and Harry did not want to know where it had been dragged out from. His masculine sensibilities also chafed at wearing it, although he had to admit that it did the trick. A mug of hot chocolate had also been shoved into his hands, with strict instructions for him to drink it all.

This was the only thing he did with relish. The mug itself would have been enough to warm him, but the chocolate was hot, thick, and rich and stuck to the top of his mouth. The liquid spread through his body and warmed him from the tips of his toes right through to the hair on top of his head and chased away the lingering chill of the Dementors.

Afterwards, came several hours of gruelling questioning, made all the worse by the polite and respectful facade it was behind. "Did you see anything suspicious? Did the Dementors target anyone else? Had anyone seen you without your disguise? Could anyone have? Are you positive? Sure? Did you tell anyone where you were going? Why did you decide to go?" and on and on the questions went, often been repeated in the hopes of gleaning some new information, or prompting a half forgotten memory. They didn't seem to understand that Harry didn't know anything and couldn't begin to guess at anything either. All they were doing was reminding Harry of the horrible day's events. Not that he could forget. No, the sight of his guards lifeless eyes, staring from still breathing bodies would be burned in his memories until the day he died. The fact that it had happened in his defence only made the hollow feeling in the pit of his stomach grow. He hadn't put a name to that feeling yet, but in time he would recognise it as guilt. It would take an even longer period of time before he could acknowledge it as survivor's guilt and place that feeling firmly where it belonged.

At this period of time, however, his guilt was the last thing on his mind. Instead there was both a growing irritation and tiredness. Irritation at being asked the same questions again and again and tiredness as a culmination of the day's events. Eventually after been asked a particularly personal (and frankly in Harry's mind, irrelevant) question, he decided enough was enough. He stood up abruptly, the pink, fluffy blanket falling from his shoulders. The aurors paused and looked at him, the Dicto Quill hovered mid sentence.

"Your Majesty?" one questioned in uncertainty.

Harry looked at his watch pointedly, "Gentleman," he began scathingly. "I have been here for three hours. In that time we have established nothing. Quite frankly I wish for this interrogation to be over."

Harry whirled on his feet and stalked over to the door. He pulled on it, but it was locked. His heart already racing from his earlier attack

quickened and his hand edged towards his wand. He turned to face his now apparent jailers. One was reading the notes from the interrogation, whilst the other was staring at him.

"What are you two playing at?"

The one reading the notes, head snapped up and he looked at Harry in confusion. The other smirked.

"I don't know what you mean Your Majesty. Why don't you sit down and we will continue with the report." said the smirking auror.

Harry glared, "open the door."

"I think Your Majesty is quite capable of opening a door for yourself."

The other auror shifted uncomfortable, "Jimmy what are you doing?"

"Unlock the door." Harry commanded.

"Is it locked?" said Jimmy innocently, and then laughed.

Harry drew his wand and in a flash, Jimmy was on his feet, his own wand drawn and pointed at Harry. That did it for the other auror.

"For god's sake, Jimmy." He snapped. "What do you think you are doing raising your wand to the King? This has gone on way longer then it should have and we have no right to detain him. This interview is over."

He waved his wand as he said the final sentence. The Dicto Quill fell uselessly to the side, and there was an audible click behind Harry as the door unlocked, but Harry didn't dare move an inch. Jimmy was still training his wand on him.

"Jimmy, lower your wand." said the other auror tersely.

"No." said Jimmy.

"Don't do this Jimmy." There was a note of warning in his tone.

Something flashed across Jimmy's face and when he spoke there was an edge of desperation to his voice, "He deserves it Matt. My brother was killed because of him and I want to know why."

An image of a soulless man, similar in face to the Auror before him flashed before Harry's eyes and he felt a momentary pang of pity, but it was not enough. He could still see the pointed wand and the very dangerous wizard holding it in place.

"That wasn't his fault Jimmy. Hold your wand against those who are really responsible, or is your brother's sacrifice to be worthless. He gave his soul to save the King's. Don't undo your brother's last action." Matt reasoned.

Jimmy looked hesitant for the moment and Harry could see grief and confusion in his eyes. Slowly, slowly he lowered his wand. As soon as it was safely away, Matt's calm demeanour changed, replaced with that of a cool, professional. He flicked his wand and bindings appeared around Jimmy's wrist. "I'm sorry to do this Jimmy but... you are under arrest for threatening the King's person with bodily harm."

The door behind Harry burst open and several aurors came running in. They were surprised to see him already detained but the aurors quickly took control and escorted him from the room. Jimmy did not protest at all. In fact, to Harry's eye, he seemed strangely detached.

Matt faced Harry and offered him a bow, "I'm sorry Your Majesty. Jimmy...he is one of the best at mind spells. He told me that he suspected your mind had been tampered with, that the Dementors were a distraction. He told me that he needed the time to judge if that were the case, otherwise I would never have let the interview go on for so long. I would never have guessed, although I should have, he seemed distracted, and I didn't know his brother was one of your guards; otherwise I would not have let him near anyone involved with the attack. I'm so sorry Your Majesty, but at least you are safe now. You can relax."

Harry hadn't realised that he was still clutching his wand tightly, and he had unconsciously moved into a slight duelling stance, but with Matt's proclamation of safety, Harry was jolted back to reality. His breathing slowed and he loosened his hold on his wand before holstering it. He got out of the duelling stance and tried to straighten

himself, but the effort seemed too much in his tiredness and he sighed ruefully.

"Safe? Perhaps for now I am, but I begin to realise that I may never be truly safe again."

Matt looked appraisingly at Harry, "We will make you safe Your Majesty. We will protect you."

Harry smiled sadly. Yes they would protect him, but how long would their protections last. They could not be on their guard for everything. Today he had been lucky, but his enemies only needed to be lucky once.

He didn't voice these thoughts; instead he turned his head slightly and said, "I'm tired. I think I am ready to go home now."

Amelia Bones stared tiredly at her empty office. The Bruce Doyle investigation had slowed, and the Dementors investigation had so far yielded few results. The only thing she was certain of was that at least in this point of time the Dementors were under the Ministry control. This ordinarily would have been a comfort to her, after all who wanted rogue Dementors swooping about, but with the attack on the King it only offered a cool awareness of treachery, and her absolute inability to do anything about it.

Amelia wasn't an idiot. She knew that the Dementors could not be ordered by just anybody in the Ministry. She knew that there were maybe only a hundred personnel who could order them. The problem was that many people had access to both those personnel and their offices. How easy would it be to steal a signature authorizing one thing, or to slip a piece of parchment under the signing hand of a superior by a trusted underling? The order would be given, and nobody would question it, or think to question it, and then perhaps the true traitor gets off, having successfully cast all evidence of wrong doing onto someone else.

Or maybe the person did sign knowingly but not freely. Imperiused or Confounded to do the bidding of a master, they would sign the death warrant of their own child if told to. Could they be blamed?

Amelia may not have been an idiot but many in the Ministry were. Lazy as well as stupid, many, who owed their positions to status at



birth rather than any true skill, passed on all actual work to underlings, who could very well be the traitor.

Amelia was beset with incompetence, corruption, and treachery; three mighty rams that could well bring down the ministry. Only a week into her investigation and it had been thwarted at every turn. No evidence had yet come to light, and as time passed she had little hope of finding any. She was not political, but the public was demanding answers, and she feared that Fudge, needing a scapegoat would seek to blame and replace her as Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, then where would they be? She was not so arrogant as to believe herself the only capable person in the Ministry, but at least she knew herself to be trustworthy, something that her replacement may not be...

But she was getting ahead of herself. She wouldn't be replaced. Fudge may seek to blame her, but she was powerful and popular in her own right and Fudge knew that. He wouldn't want to risk attacking her, lest it backfire on him. Still she would have to be careful. Fudge may not try to replace her, but he could and would seek to interfere, and some of her investigations were a bit too sensitive to allow that.

Speaking of investigations, there was a knock on the door and Auror Tonks walked in. Amelia Bones immediately straightened and tried to hide her tiredness. She knew it was important that her people never saw her as anything but their infallible commander. She also knew she was very good at the act, but apparently not good enough, because as the young auror saluted, she looked concernedly at her boss. Madam Bones ignored the look and waved the rookie to a seat.

"Report."

Tonks shifted uncomfortably, "We've found the traitor in the Kings guard." She eventually said.

Bones straightened noticeably, "Well, who is it?"

"Kert Swinton, ma'am."

"Have you made the arrest yet?" she asked eagerly.

"No ma'am." Her eyes stared just above Madam Bones's shoulder.

"Why not? I want him in custody immediately. He's not with the King now is he?"

Tonks shook her head mutely.

"Then why isn't he in custody?" she practically shouted.

"Swinton's dead." was the deadpan reply.

Amelia Bones froze, all her hopes disappearing.

"Dead? What do you mean he is dead?"

Tonks took a deep breath, "Just that Ma'am. He was found earlier this morning. Murdered I suspect, but I have no proof. The Aurors on the scene found no magical evidence of murder, and of course they fouled up the crime scene searching, so any hope of finding muggle evidence is practically nil."

This was an uncommon problem, simply because most of the crimes they dealt with were magical in nature, and most wizards and witches wouldn't think to use muggle means. Whilst a lot of aurors did know how to deal with a crime scene the muggle way (mostly because they had a lot of interaction with the muggle police, or had trained with them for a time) an equal number didn't.

"So another dead end then." She stated rather than asked, then continued, "Check the muggle way anyway. Who knows, we may get lucky."

Neither thought this was particularly likely, but at this point it was their only lead.

"The Aurors on scene do not know that he was our leak do they?"

Tonks nodded in confirmation.

"Good keep it that way. Anything else to report?"

"Jimmy Ward, who detained and threatened the King, is being sent to St Mungos, to undergo psychiatric treatment. The King has

decided to pardon him on the grounds of his brother's sacrifice, and in the light of Jimmy's apparent instability. We hadn't realised, but apparently all that time investigating the minds of others, and subjecting himself to their torments left a toll on him. His mind had been on the brink for some time now, but losing his brother pushed him over the edge."

Madam Bones acknowledged the new information. She felt rather bad for Jimmy Ward. He had been one of the best, and had done a lot of good. When she had heard that Jimmy had attacked the King, she had been shocked and dismayed. He had been a hero in the first war. He had been their number one profiler, predicting the enemy's movements better than almost anybody. He had gone mind to mind with many a death eater, finding and seeking in the deep and dark recesses that which they held secret even as he witnessed the depraved acts that they had committed. He had wrestled with spells holding sway over innocent minds, and had even at times broken the imperius cast by the Dark Lord himself. They should have known that no one could do all that without taking some hurt themselves. They should have helped him back then, before it came to this. But at least he would now be getting the help he needed. Perhaps in time he would recover enough to rejoin society, but he would never be allowed back into active service.

She sighed deeply and wrote something on a piece of parchment, signed it quickly and handed it to the patiently waiting auror.

"Put that on the notice board on the way out." She ordered.

"Yes ma'am." She looked curiously down at it and her eyebrows rose, and changed colour.

"Is this really necessary?" she asked.

Bones nodded, "Yes. Not many did as much as Jimmy Ward did, but we are now aware of the risk. I want all Aurors who were involved in the mind arts to be checked by a mind healer. It might be wise even to make all aurors undergo checks on a regular basis, but at the moment we will only check those at the most risk. The case of Jimmy Ward has opened our eyes at least to the dangers, though it's too late for him."

Tonks nodded in understanding, and after a few more orders she was dismissed.

Once she was gone, Amelia rested her head in her hands and sighed heavily. Things were just going to get more complicated.

"Expecto Patronum." Harry shouted, beads of sweat dripping from his forehead. His eyes were clenched shut as he tried to focus on a happy memory.

All that burst out of his wand was a thin silver mist that quickly disappeared. It was no better than the previous ten attempts. In fact it was worse, which was probably due to the fact that Harry was exhausting himself. He let out a shout of anger and glared at the space where the mist had been, as if willing it to reappear.

Harry was in one of the Auror training rooms in the Ministry of Magic. He had in fact occupied that room everyday for an hour since the attack in Diagon Alley. After recovering from the attack, he had quickly resolved to find a way to defend himself from the likes of those creatures. He never wanted to feel so helpless and depressed again. He had expressed this wish to one of his guards, who had swiftly made arrangements for him to have lessons on the Patronus charm. The guards were eager for Harry to learn any and all self defence. In fact they had been incredibly pleased when they had seen the duelling posters in his room and when he had shown knowledge of different techniques. They had been less pleased to find out he had competed in duelling competitions as they deemed it an unnecessary risk to his safety. Harry had pointed out that it was done in a secure environment, but that hadn't cheered them at all. Harry had then said that if he didn't practice how could he improve, and whilst that hadn't cheered them, it put a stop to their complaints.

The Ministry of Magic had happily given him this room for his private use, clearing it out everyday so that he could get the practice in. So everyday Harry diligently went, and his guards stationed around the room watched as he tried and failed to produce the charm.

"That was a very good attempt Your Majesty." said Auror Savage, his assigned teacher.

Harry glared at him, "No it wasn't. I'm not even close to producing the charm."

"Your Majesty, as I have told you before, it is a very difficult charm and most adult witches and wizards can't even produce a mist. You are doing very well, considering it has only been a week since you started learning."

Harry turned and started to cast the spell again. He thought that Savage was just trying to mollify him because he was King. He didn't actually believe that the spell was as difficult as all that, and even if it was, Harry had never had any problems learning a spell before. It was frustrating to the extreme.

Savage sighed as his King once again tried to cast a spell. His skin had turned an odd grey hue, highlighting his exhaustion and Savage suspected that the King wasn't sleeping well in addition to trying too hard. He wanted to call an end for the day, but was apprehensive over how His Majesty would take it. Harry was taking his apparent failure very hard, and Savage didn't want to hurt the King's feelings by implying he wasn't up to the challenge. Still he would have to call a stop otherwise the King would damage himself. He opened his mouth, but was saved by a knock on the door. Harry paused mid casting, and a guard opened the door.

In hurried a minor Ministry Official who offered a bow to Harry.

"Your Majesty, this letter just arrived for you." He said to Harry, handing over a letter, before being dismissed.

Savage seized on the opportunity. "Well, I think we have practiced enough for the day. Shall we meet again at the same time tomorrow Your Majesty?"

Harry looked up from where he had been examining a familiar seal and nodded absentmindedly, "Yes... wait no. I have a meeting tomorrow at this time. I'm busy most of the day in fact. Perhaps we could have a lunchtime session."

"Your Majesty shouldn't miss a meal." said Savage with a frown.

Harry waved off his concern, "I'll grab something quickly on the way, but it will be my only opportunity, and this is important."

"Very well, Your Majesty. I will see you tomorrow."

Harry was already back to gazing at the letter though, and as Savage left he wondered what was so special about a Hogwarts letter.

Harry sat down, leaning his back against the wall as his fingers gently traced the crest, sealing the parchment. He didn't care that others were watching him. Though he didn't want to leave Beauxbatons, there was something satisfying about receiving a letter from the school he had wanted to go to so long ago.

Eleven year old Harry was silently listening through the door of the Kitchen as his parents talked inside.

"I'm so proud of Chris, James. I mean of course, I knew that he would get into Hogwarts, but it was still so nice to have it confirmed." Lily rambled.

"Uh hum."

"And of course Glory will go next year and it will be so exciting to have both of them there. They'll both be Gryffindors I'm sure. Just like us."

"Uh hum."

"James are you even listening to me?" Lily snapped.

"What...oh yes of course. It's just; I wonder what happened to Harry's letter?"

Harry had been wondering that as well. Although he supposed that it must be coming at a later point.

Lily hesitated before speaking slowly, "James...I think he is a squib."

Harry drew back slightly. A squib? Weren't they people who couldn't do magic? Well Harry knew that he could do magic. He did magic all the time.

"A squib Lily? Impossible. The Potters have never had a squib... ever!"

"Oh James, be realistic when have we ever seen Harry do any magic?"

'Since you never see me at all...' Harry thought resentfully.

"But Lily, a Squib!"

"I know its hard James, but you have got to accept it."

'No he doesn't.' thought Harry,' logically he must know I have magic. I'm a Parselmouth!'

"I guess you are right Lily, but the poor boy is going to be crushed. I remember looking forward to going to Hogwarts so much at that age...Whose going to tell him that he won't get to go?"

'No one. I'm going to go to Hogwarts, my letter will come and I'll prove I'm not a squib.' Harry thought, as he ran upstairs, tears streaming down his face before his parents could open the door and find him there.

Harry unconsciously wiped his own tears away, as the memory assaulted him. Of course the letter never had come, but he had ended up going to Beauxbatons. He had been so happy there, happier then he could have been at Hogwarts, overshadowed as he would have been by Chris.

He shook away those melancholy thoughts and opened the letter.

HOGWARTS SCHOOL OF WITCHCRAFT AND WIZARDRY

Headmaster: Albus Dumbledore

(Order of Merlin, First Class, Grand Sorc., Chf. Warlock,

Supreme Mugwump, International Confed. Of Wizards)

Your Majesty,

We are pleased to inform you that you have a place at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Please find enclosed a list of all necessary books and equipment.

Term begins on 1 September.

Yours sincerely,

Minerva McGonagall

Deputy Headmistress

Ps. Your Majesty, we have received your report from your time at Beauxbatons and am pleased to inform you that you will have no problem being placed in the correct class level with your peers, having exemplary results as you do. However several of the classes that you have taken at Beauxbatons are not on offer in Hogwarts. If you wish to continue studying these subjects, please owl me as soon as possible so that we can make any necessary arrangements. Secondly on your first night at Hogwarts you are to, when leaving the train, join the first years so that you may be sorted into the correct house. If you have any questions, feel free to owl me.

Harry resolved to owl her later, but for the moment took out his equipment list, wondering if he would be able to go himself or if he would need to send someone to get his things for him. Most likely the latter, he thought.

He perused it, stopping when he saw the name of the Defence Against the Dark Arts book. Something about it and its author sounded familiar.

"Have you heard of 'Defence Magical Theory' by Wilbert Slinkhard?" he asked one of his guards.

The guard snorted, "That rubbish. Of course I've heard of it. Most useless book I've ever read. Not surprising considering it's written by Witless Wilbert."

Then Harry remembered where he had heard of Wilbert Slinkhard. The man had been an auror in the first war, until he had somehow managed to lose two, completely bound prisoners on the way to their trial. He had been dismissed from the corps, but not before the news had made headlines. The fact that he had written a book on defence had been shocking enough. That it had been assigned as the defence text was telling.



He looked at his guard and said, "I think I may need to have some more Defence tutoring."

The guard grinned.

Dolores Umbridge was sitting down for dinner when she heard a knock at her door. She got up angrily to answer it. She wasn't expecting visitors and she hated when her meals were interrupted. Still in case it was someone important, she smoothed her skirt, straightened the bow in her hair and pasted a sickly sweet smile on her face.

The smile instantly faded when she saw the man, cloaked in black stood on her doorstep. She staggered backwards, clutching her chest as she stared in front of her.

"You're supposed to be dead." She gasped, her eyes alight with fright.

From within the arms of the figure escaped a high pitched laugh.

In a sleepy little village all was quiet. The sun was shining, the birds were singing and nothing could disturb the peace.

CRASH

"Ow!" came the shout from within one house.

All right, almost nothing.

"Are you alright Chris?"

"Yes Dad. I just dropped my trunk on my foot, that's all," came the sarcastic retort.

"Do you want me to put a feather light charm on it for you?"

"Yes please."

"Have you got your broomstick Chris?" asked Lily Potter

"Yes Mum!" He rolled his eyes.

"Glory, why haven't you finished packing yet?"

"I only have my make-up to add," she whined loudly.

Within a room in the house, a teenage boy slept on, oblivious to the mayhem around him. He snuggled, deeply into his pillow, a small smile creeping onto his face. He looked almost peaceful, but even in sleep there was a slight tension to his figure.

There was a gentle knock on his door. Harry let out a snore and rolled over. There was another knock on the door.

Outside a whispered argument took place. Then the door creaked open, allowing in the guard who had lost the argument and thus had to wake up the teenager. The guard looked with great amusement at the sight of his sleeping Lord. The reason he was so amused became apparent when Harry rolled over, kicking off his light duvet. Harry was wearing pyjamas with little, yellow ducks printed all over them. The ducks in the image, like Harry were sleeping, with their heads underneath a wing, although one or two were beginning to wake up and were busy ruffling their feathers and blinking. Later

when they were fully awake, they would begin to quack. They were a present from Krum and the only reason Harry was wearing them at all was because all his other pyjamas were packed; otherwise he wouldn't be seen dead wearing them.

The guard shook off his amusement and stepped fully into the room. He cleared his throat and said gently, "Your Majesty."

Harry rolled over.

The guard stepped closer, "Your Majesty, it's time to wake up."

Harry let out another little snore. The guard sighed with exasperation and walked over to the sleeping King and reached out to his shake his shoulders.

Harry was awake in an instant. Jolted out of his sleep he sat straight up, disorientated and breathing heavily. The guard stepped back in surprise. It took a moment for where Harry was to register and when it had he stared at his guard in confusion. It had been years since he had needed to be woken up by anyone! He must have been exhausted.

Once the King had orientated himself the guard said somewhat pointlessly, "It's time to get up Your Majesty. You have to go to school."

Harry nodded, and swung his bare feet onto the floor. He yawned widely and stretched out, arching his back as he did so.

"What time is it?" he muttered absently.

"10:30, Your Majesty."

He paused, mid-stretch, blinked once, twice and then said quite eloquently, "Oh Shit!"

The guard returned to his post outside the door, as Harry hurriedly started to dress, and pack the remainder of his belongings. It was typical that of all the days that he had to sleep in, it was the first day of his new school. Thankfully, he had prepared everything the night before, although breakfast had to be skipped. Harry was tempted to grab a piece of toast on the way out, but he figured that with the

press that were bound to be waiting at the station, that would probably not make a good impression.

His trunk, floating behind him he took the stairs two at a time, arriving at the front door just as his father was taking out a portkey.

"Cutting it a bit tight this morning, aren't we Harry?" James said.

Harry shrugged and glared at him. James looked taken aback for a moment, before recovering.

"Remember everyone; the press will be at the station. So be on your best behaviour."

Harry thought that if it were not for the presence of his guards, James would have said a lot more. However Harry wasn't an idiot, he knew his part well. He had been playing it for as long as he could remember. Harry had a brief, rebellious moment, where he considered not doing what he was taught to do. He imagined arriving at the station and walking straight onto the train, ignoring his mother and father, allowing everyone there to see his level of contempt for his family, for everyone to know just what kind of people they were, how neglectful they were... but that was just it. Everyone would know! Once they knew a small amount, it wouldn't take long to dig up the rest. They would dig up every slight, every humiliation, and every moment of loneliness. They would think him weak, and Harry had worked so hard to not be thought of as weak. Or worse, they may side with his family; the same family, which had been the darling of the media ever since that fateful night. Harry wouldn't be able to bear it if that happened.

Or they may side with him. But great as that would be, that too would only end in sadness. His family would be vilified, spat at on every corner, unable to go out onto the streets without being attacked. Harry didn't want that to happen either, because as much as he hated his family, he also loved them. He would never trust them; could never trust them but the only reason they were able to hurt him was because of the love Harry held for them. By caring for them, he couldn't help but care for what they did to him. You can't help but love your family. Oh Harry wasn't deluding himself anymore. He knew that his family did not care for him in any way. They thought

him as a nuisance, a pebble in the bottom of their shoe. That did not change in any way Harry's own feelings.

So Harry would be patient. He would hold up his part in this act for a fake family, and then later, when he was finally away from them, he would forget about them completely. He would forget, the love and the hate and the family connection. He would forget completely about the past hurts, and longing and cast all ties away. They would be as strangers to him; Nothing more, nothing less. They would be strangers and he would be free of them and this conflicting mess of emotion as well.

Harry took hold of the portkey, and with a hook behind his navel, he was away.

They arrived at the Kings Cross portkey arrival point, which was stationed next to Platform 7 & 5/8ths, and were quickly hustled out of the way to make way for the next arrivals. Harry was quickly surrounded by his guards (and Chris and Glory theirs), just in time for the next portkey to arrive, carrying a blonde witch in a muggle business suit. She quickly exited the notice-me-not charmed area and joined the hustle and bustle of similarly dressed people within the station, not sparing their party a glance as she passed.

"Come on," said James, glancing at his watch. "We're going to be late."

The group hustled out into the muggle part of the station, passing a middle aged man, who was busy arguing with an official about the strange looking fish that was busy flopping about in his arms, sans tank.

Despite being a conspicuous group of people they did not attract attention within the muggle part of the station. This could have being because of the charms on them, making them seem wholly uninteresting. Equally likely, would have been the fact that this is London, where it is considered poor form to make eye contact or talk to strangers, unless you are asking directions or asking for the time.

This may be why the Statute of Secrecy was able to hold up within England, where wizards are indeed very ignorant about the basics of muggle culture.

They reached the barrier for platform 9 3/4.

"Right then. This is how we will do it. Her Royal Highness and Her Grace will proceed first, followed by His Royal Highness and His Grace. Your Majesty will enter last, otherwise I fear Your Majesty's presence would block the entrance and the Royal Family would not be able to follow," said one of the guards.

Lily looked like she swallowed something sour. The idea that Harry could cause such a furore when Chris never had, was distinctly repulsive to her.

Harry just nodded in agreement and waited patiently as his family crossed the barrier. When finally the last of Chris's guard force had gone through, Harry with a guard next to him, pushing his trolley walked through.

There was an instant uproar of shouted questions, and flashing of cameras. Harry tried to blink away the light as question after question was shouted at him. In the background was the excited chatter of children, as well as the occasional hooting of an owl and the mewling of cats. It was chaos at its best.

The faces converged around him, pushing against him, hands reaching to grab him, to touch him. He was being pulled in every direction. It was madness!

Then suddenly there was a pair of arms around him and he was being pulled close against a tall body. It was a liveried guard, holding out his wand threateningly and staring at the gathered crowd. Two more guards stepped in front and two behind, all of them with their wands out ahead of them. The crowd unconsciously took a step back, and Harry breathed a sigh of relief. The guard did not release him though. His eyes scanned the crowd and together they pushed through the mass until they reached a cordoned off area, where the students and their families were saying their goodbyes.

Once through the guard lent down and said lowly, "I apologise, My Liege, for the rough handling. We should have been more vigilant."

Harry gulped, his panic subsiding a little. He had not ever experienced such disorientation. He had been blinded by the light, and all the hands grabbing and reaching and pulling him in every

direction. Never had he been more grateful for the presence of the guards. He expressed so.

The guard glared at the crowd who were still taking pictures and shouting from behind the cordoned area. Their noise and light though was muted and so manageable.

"They're vultures," said the guard.

Harry couldn't agree more.

"Shall we go deal with the magpies, Your Majesty?"

"Magpies?" Harry asked in confusion.

"Your family. They are like magpies; attracted to bright, shiny things." He nodded in the direction of the flashing bulbs.

Harry snorted slightly. He had the sudden image of his mum's head attached to a bird like body, covered in huge, golden jewellery, preening in front of hundreds of different cameras.

He looked over at his family, and decided it was a rather apt description.

When they reached the rest of the Potters, Lily pasted a sweet smile on her face, which nonetheless didn't reach her eyes. She rushed over to Harry and started to smooth out his clothes and hair, patting him to see if he was hurt in anyway.

"My goodness, Harry," she said loudly, "are you all right? We tried to get to you, but we couldn't through the crowd."

Harry squirmed out of her grip, partially in the act of a normal teenager whose mum was embarrassing him. This was not completely an act, because in truth she was embarrassing him, and he could see out of the corner of his eye several students giggling and smirking at him. The bigger reason and the more truthful reason though was because he could not stand her touch especially when it was in fake concern.

"I'm fine, mum," Harry muttered.

"Don't mutter. It's unbecoming," Lily scolded loudly. There were a few more twitters of laughter, and Harry felt himself blushing. Such a brilliant first impression he was making on his classmates.

Lily finished her inspection and stepped back, before hugging him tightly. Then she hugged Glory and finally Chris, before standing each of them in front of her.

"Now be good you three, and have a great school year. Harry, mind your brother and your sister. They have been going to this school longer than you have. Chris look out for Harry, I am expecting letters home everyday."

'Right,' Harry thought. 'Chris is her designated spy within the school and she expects me to follow his orders. Yeah, right!'

"Yes mum." Chris said, shooting a smirk in Harry's direction. Harry raised an eyebrow at him, and Chris's smirk faltered.

Lily then made a great show of saying goodbye to her children, which the photographers and reporters lapped up before bustling them onto the train, just as the warning whistle was going. Harry glanced down at his watch, and saw that it was 11:00 on the dot, and that they had only just made it onto the train on time. Of course if Harry had paused to think, he would have realised that the train would never have left without him.

Out of sight of the reporters and photographers, the three of them let there facade drop. Glory did not bother waiting around, but flicked her hair over her shoulders and stalked off. Chris crossed his arms and smirked.

"Well Harry, or should I say Your Majesty, mum said that you've got to mind me. Would you like to know where to start?"

Harry leant against the wall and looked out the window, "Oh Chris. You act as if Mother actually has any power over me."

Chris bristled, "What are you on about. You always do as you're told."

"Which is why I'm currently sharing the throne with you... oh wait, I'm not. Grow up Chris; we're going to be in Scotland! The most Mum



and Dad can do is send a Howler, and the both of us know that they won't even do that."

Chris's hand reached for his wand before he remembered himself, and he smirked again and mirrored Harry's own apparent nonchalance.

"Maybe not, but you are forgetting something."

Harry turned away from the window and asked, "And what is that?"

"That you are on my territory now. I know this school, and I know these people. I can turn these people against you. Just remember, you may be the King, but I am the Boy-Who-Lived. Whose side do you think that they will be on if they have to choose."

Harry tried not to show how much those words echoed his own inner fears. Instead he smiled and said lightly, "I don't know, but I do know that it won't come to that. At least not yet."

Chris tilted his head, acknowledging the truth in his words.

"No, not yet," He then whirled on his heels and left, leaving Harry alone but for his guards.

Harry breathed heavily and leaned against the cool glass of the window. His guard said quietly, "That got a little bit tense there."

Harry shook his head, before straightening. "I think, we'd better find a compartment," He said, whilst shaking off the lingering effects of the confrontation.

They left, but echoing in the back of his mind was a threat, a promise of the choices that would have to be made. The sure knowledge that Harry's wish to forget his family would not be allowed, and that sometime soon, the truth would be heard. Lingered in Harry's thoughts were his brother's words.

Not Yet.

"Your Majesty, over here!"

Harry looked to where the voice was coming from, and breathed a sigh of relief as he recognised one of his Seneschals, Ron Weasley. He had been looking for a compartment for fifteen minutes, but every time he had found one, the people inside had stared at him in some kind of awe, making Harry feel very uncomfortable.

That's not to say that Ron Weasley did not also make him feel uncomfortable. After all, the boy had faced Voldemort, but Harry had got to know him over the past weeks, and so was beginning to realise that the boy was very much human. Of course it helped that Ron was sworn to him, and seemed to hold him in just as much respect as he held Ron. Harry suspected that the beginnings of a friendship were forming.

Harry walked over to the open door of the compartment, and went inside.

"Hi Ron."

The other occupant of the compartment had stood up as Harry entered. He was a brown haired boy, with a round face and an easy smile. He offered a bow to Harry.

"Your Majesty," he greeted.

Ron smiled, "Sir, I would like to introduce you to Lord Diagon."

Harry tried to remember who held that title. It was at the back of his mind, but he had to remember so many titles that the name eluded him. It couldn't be too difficult as there weren't too many peers his age. He frowned in deep thought. Then he remembered and his eyes widened. Diagon referred to the Barony of Diagon, which encompassed not only the famous alley, but several other wizarding districts within the area. It was a secondary title of the Earl of Lanarkshire, and courtesy title of his eldest son, whose name was...

"You're Neville Longbottom!"

Neville Longbottom grinned and shrugged in a self deprecating way, "Yeah."

Harry couldn't help but feel the awe bubbling up inside of him and he had to clamp down on that emotion. He was not going to act like a fan girl!

Neville held out a hand nervously, "It's a pleasure to meet you, Your Majesty."

Harry took the hand, somewhat quicker than he meant to, and noted the firm grip and calloused hands.

Neville smiled, obviously noting the eagerness of Harry's shake. Harry for his part felt a steady flush growing on his cheeks. He was King! He was best friends with an international Quidditch star! He had met the Queen of England and the Prime Minister. There was absolutely no reason at all for him to feel this nervous.

Well there was no use hiding it. Neville had obviously noted his reaction. He might as well just own up to it.

"I'm sorry." He said, running a hand through his hair, "I have to admit that I am a bit intimidated by you. I mean, it's not every day you meet someone who killed a Basilisk; let alone someone who killed one at the age of 12."

"I had a lot of help, but I know what you mean. I'm a bit nervous myself. I mean, you're a King... the King... my King."

Ron who had been watching in amusement, interjected loudly, "Wait a bloody second. You're intimidated by Neville, but not of me? I faced Voldemort!"

Harry shrugged, "Yeah, but you've sworn an oath to serve me. I can't exactly be intimidated by you after that."

Ron stared for a second at Harry's logic before throwing himself down on a chair, and putting his feet on the table in the compartment, "Fair enough. Pass a chocolate frog, Neville."

Neville obligingly did so, and the three made themselves comfortable in the compartment. The door was shut behind Harry and a guard took station outside, giving them a little bit of privacy.

Neville turned back to what he was doing before Harry came in, and Harry stared in abject fascination.

"What is that?" he breathed, looking at the tiny plant, which looked like a diseased cactus.

Neville looked up, and smiled broadly, "This is a *mimulus mimbletonia*. I got it from my Great Uncle Algie, for my birthday. It's really, really rare!"

"Neville's a Herbology genius." said Ron, from around a mouthful of chocolate.

Harry leant in close, examining the pulsating plant. It was creepy.

"Does it do anything?" he asked.

"Yeah, it has a really great defen...Don't do that!"

Too late. Harry had already poked the plant in fascination, causing dark green jets of thick, oozing, stinking liquid to burst from every boil that covered the plant. It hit the ceiling, the windows, the seats, the table, but most of it went into Harry's leaning face.

A mouthful, tasting like manure entered his mouth, causing him to spit and gag in disgust, as his eyes watered.

Ron collapsed in gales of laughter, whilst Neville stared in horror, only able to say, "I'm sorry, Sire. Oh, I should have warned you. It's not poisonous though, really. It just smells, really, really bad. Oh no! This is not good. This is not good at all."

It was at that precise moment that the compartment door slid open.

"What is going on here?" said Draco Malfoy, whose eyes were practically bugging at the sight of his Liege Lord, gagging and covered in green ooze. You could tell that he was fighting his inborn tendency to sneer.

He turned to Ron, who was laughing with tears running down his face, as he lay on his back clutching his chest.

"I can't breathe." He gasped, between laughs.

"Weasley, you didn't prank His Majesty did you?" he asked, insulted by the very thought.

"No." Ron groaned, "But I wish I had. That was brilliant!"

Malfoy turned his attention back to the sight of the apologising Neville and the spluttering Harry, and muttered "By Merlin, do I have to do everything? Scourgify."

The Stinksap instantly vanished, and Harry stopped his spluttering.

Suddenly Harry felt very foolish indeed, and by the way Malfoy was looking at him, Harry wondered if he had let him down somehow, after all the Malfoys were very concerned about propriety. Harry spluttering around like a monkey, covered in gunk probably offended his sensibilities.

Harry's suspicion were confirmed as Malfoy decided to act even more...Malfoyish than usual in an effort to teach his King proper decorum.

He offered Harry a deep bow, and Harry nodded his head in response. Malfoy then turned to Ron and said, "Weasley, you're expected in the Prefects compartment."

Ron, who had finally stopped laughing, looked confused, "Why? I'm not a prefect."

Malfoy sneered and couldn't resist fingering his own, shiny prefect badge.

"I know that Weasley. Do you really think that they would make anyone but Chris Potter a prefect? I know it's hard, but try not to act like such an idiot. It's embarrassing to the rest of us Seneschals."

Ron flexed his fingers angrily, and his ears turned slightly red, but otherwise he didn't react.

Malfoy grinned in victory, and Harry turned away, well used to the antics of the two of them by now, and not wishing to get involved in what was obviously a long standing rivalry.

Neville asked, "Why do they want Ron if he isn't a prefect?"

Malfoy would have shrugged were the action not beneath him.

"They want all the Seneschals in the compartment, and no, I have no idea why. I'm just passing on the message."

Harry frowned, "Do they want me to attend the meeting Draco?"

"They did not say so, but then I do not believe that they are so foolish as to presume that they can summon Your Majesty to a meeting, but I don't believe that your presence will be required, Sire."

Harry nodded. "That makes sense. I am to attend a meeting with the Headmaster after the Sorting Feast anyway. I gather that anything I need to know will be told to me then."

"That does make sense. If you will excuse us Sire, we really must be going as it took longer then I expected to find Seneschal Weasley."

Harry gave them permission and with a final bow, Malfoy left the compartment with Ron in tow.

Once they had left, Neville started to put away his plant, figuring it had caused enough problems for one day. Harry leant back in his chair, shut his eyes and groaned, "Well that was embarrassing."

"..."

"Oh, really, don't say anything to reassure me."

Harry opened his eyes, to see a slight smile on Neville's face, "I can't really say anything to reassure you, because I really don't think you could have made a worse impression."

"Thanks." Harry closed his eyes again.

"If it makes you feel any better, I'll get the mimulus mimbletonia to squirt Draco later. We'll see how he reacts to that..."

Harry snorted at the image of the impeccable Draco Malfoy dancing around, covered in Stinksap.

"...of course, it will really only be you who gets to see his reaction, because I'll be dead. No way, will I survive his revenge, but I'm really to sacrifice myself for the greater good of it all."

Harry opened his eyes and saw Neville openly grinning, "You're nothing like I expected, Neville Longbottom."

Neville's grin faded a little, "What did you expect?"

Harry shrugged, "I don't know. I was half way expecting some animal skin wearing hunter from the wilds of Africa, but I think that's just my imagination talking. I definitely didn't expect someone so down to earth and normal."

"You're one to talk."

"I bet you were expecting someone like Chris."

Neville crossed his arms, "No way. If you were like Chris Potter, you would never have become King, but... I still didn't expect someone like you. I guess, I always pictured the King as someone who would be untouchable, a step above the rest of us, handsome, brave, and regal in every way."

"I think I definitely disproved that last one." Harry said wryly.

"I don't know. I mean, maybe you are some of those things, and maybe you are not, but at the same time there is something about you. I can't put my finger on it, maybe I am just imagining it, but I felt it the moment you walked through that compartment door."

Harry shifted uncomfortably.

Neville shook his head, "Sorry, I sometimes get carried away a little."

Harry attempted a smile, "No problem, I understand."

There was a sudden commotion outside the compartment and Harry could hear his guard arguing with someone. Then the door slid open revealing his guard, holding his wand against the head of a small, blonde girl. The girl in question seemed oblivious to the guard.

"Has anyone seen a teapot?" she asked.

Harry stared, "a what?"

"Miss, I told you that you can not enter this compartment."

The girl turned a confused look on the guard, "But I am in this compartment."

The guard thought she was being deliberately obtuse.

"You will leave this compartment now, or I will force you to leave."

The blonde tilted her head, "There's a large number of Furies around your head. They've being known to cause aggression."

The guard was about to follow through with his threat, when Neville said, "Hi, Luna."

Luna started, as if seeing him for the first time, and Harry took the opportunity to gesture for the guard to stand down. He didn't know who the girl was, but he sensed she was no threat. The guard left, although Harry could tell it was only reluctantly.

Harry turned his attention back to Luna, who was saying, "Hello Neville. Have you seen a teapot? Mine's run away again."

Harry blinked in surprise. A teapot running away?

Neville replied very seriously, "No Luna, I am sorry. Have you checked your backpack?"

Luna blinked and shook her head. Then she beamed at Neville, "No. I haven't. That's a great idea!"

She rummaged through her bag for a few moments, pulling out the strangest of items. There was a feather, a fan, two antlers, a miniature sheep, four small doll dresses, a mouse that squeaked, then ran away and at last out popped a teapot. Luna picked up the squirming teapot and wagged her finger at it.



"Naughty, Teapot. I told you to stay in the trunk. You had me worried sick. What if you had fallen and smashed? No one would be there to repair you." She scolded.

The teapot pointed its spout in the direction of her bag.

"I do not care if you were in my bag the entire time. The point is, you might not have been and I had no way of knowing."

The teapot tipped over slightly, and Luna's anger abated.

"Oh, what am I going to do with you Teapot? I can't take you anywhere and you refuse to be left behind."

The teapot let out a puff of steam and hopped once. Luna gathered it into a hug.

The sheer absurdness of it hit Harry and he couldn't hold in his laughter.

Luna turned to look at him, startled that he was there. Neville grinned and said, "Your Majesty, this is Lady Lovegood... Luna Lovegood and her delightful teapot. Lady Luna, His Majesty the King."

The teapot squirmed out of Luna's grip and executed a teapot bow in his direction, which only set Harry into greater peals of laughter. Luna executed a perfect curtsy, before standing up and looking in concern at the laughing King.

"Your Majesty, have you being infected with Liherius? They have been known to cause fits of uncontrollable laughter."

With great effort, Harry stopped laughing and said, "No. I definitely have not been infected with Liherius."

Luna looked worried, "Are you sure? I have a necklace in my bag that I made specially to ward them off."

She reached into her bag and pulled out a necklace, made of the most unusual things and long enough to reach his waist. Not wanting to be rude to the slightly odd girl, he allowed her to place it

round his neck. She had to wrap it around three times, so it would not appear so long. Harry wore it proudly.

"Thank you, very much." he said, getting up and offering Luna a courtly bow.

Luna curtsied once again, "You are most welcome, Your Majesty. Now though, I have to go and put away a very naughty teapot. Goodbye Neville."

She left the room, as suddenly as she entered it.

Harry sat back down again and Neville shook his head in amazement, "Your Majesty should be honoured."

"Huh?"

Neville gestured to the necklace, "Luna is... unusual to say the least, but I would never scorn anything she says, because normally there is some meaning that we do not understand. Nor would I refuse anything she gives me."

"I don't..."

Neville interrupted him smoothly, "Luna is an enchanter, a natural one."

Harry froze, and his mouth dropped open in shock. An enchanter!

"Not many people know it. People call her Loony, because she says strange things and wears things that to the rest of us would seem like junk. I figured it out pretty early on. Mainly because I was too shy back then, and had so few friends that an odd Ravenclaw didn't really seem bad company to clumsy, fat Lardbottom."

Harry had the image of a small, shy boy hiding from the bullies and making friends with one of the few people who wouldn't make fun of him.

"I had loads of clues. Things just seemed so much more magical around her. Things that I was pretty sure were not charmed would move on their own accord. Or she would say something that made me think that she saw magic differently to us. Then I saw her teapot

and I knew. It was far too human to be anything but enchanted, and she was too young to know the complex spells to make it act the way it did. I found out later that it was the very first thing she consciously made, that she made it as a replacement for her..."

Neville trailed off suddenly, as if he realised he was about to say something he shouldn't.

"Well, there was no denying it then. In any case, I wouldn't take that necklace off. I don't know what it does, or why Luna thought you need it, although I am sure that Luna gave us a clue that only she could understand. The point is, if Luna gave it to you, then you will have need of it. On that you can be certain."

Harry nodded, and fingered the necklace in new understanding. Neville was right. An enchanter's gift should never be scorned. They made things for a reason. Harry wouldn't take off the necklace for any reason.

He tucked it underneath his shirt, and closed his eyes, imagining that he could feel the subtle magic working, even though he knew that he couldn't.

The rest of the journey passed smoothly with no more interruptions. Neville and Harry passed the time together, as neither Ron nor Draco had returned from the meeting. Slowly the passing scenery changed from urban cities and towns to the rolling, green of the countryside. Then finally it gave way to thick forestry, the branches casting shadows through the window. Then the train slowed to a stop, and the students began to disembark.

The corridors were filled with chattering students, but the platform was less crowded, and the chaos was muted by the presence of guards who were dotted around the place. The cool air was a refreshing change from the compartment which had grown stuffy over the long day, and even the open window had not been able to elevate that completely. Harry took a deep, calming breath, smelling the slight scent of forestry, mingled with the fumes from the train behind him.

Over the heads of the students came a bobbing lamp, being held by what was quite possibly, the largest man Harry had ever seen.

"Firs'-years! Firs'-years over here!"

Groups of students, slightly shorter than the rest of the crowd broke away from the others and made their way over to the looming figure. Harry was wondering whether he should join them, or go with the rest of the older students.

The figure, scanned the rest of his students, and his eyes landed on Harry. He smiled widely beneath his scraggly beard, and his eyes crinkled. Harry got the impression that he was a very gentle sort of person.

"Over here, Yer Majesty. You'll be crossing with the Firs'-years. Don' wan' to ruin the surprise, af'er all."

The students nearest to Harry, seeing who the giant of a man was addressing, took a step back and started whispering excitedly to their neighbours. Harry offered them a shy smile and a wave.

Neville clapped him on the shoulder, "I'll see you later, Sire. Hope to see you in Gryffindor." He said, before disappearing into the mass of black cloaks.

Once he was gone, Harry squared his shoulders and pushed through the crowd to the waiting figure; Or rather his guard cleared a path for him. Once there, Harry felt very conspicuous indeed, seeing as he was much taller than the young, scared looking students around him.

He was put very much at ease by the tall man, who loudly exclaimed to the gathered students, "I'm Rubeus Hagrid, Keeper of the Keys and Grounds at Hogwarts, and Care of Magical Creatures Professor. Everyone calls me Hagrid. Is everyone here then?"

He counted the heads, before nodding in satisfaction and taking off down a dark path, in quite the opposite direction to the other students.

The younger students had to jog to keep up with Hagrid's long stride. Harry didn't, but he did find himself walking faster than normal.

"Excuse me, Professor Hagrid?"

"Just call me Hagrid, Yer Majesty."

"Err right. Well, Hagrid, what surprise were you talking about?"

"Yer firs' look at Hogwarts, o'course!" Hagrid exclaimed, as if the surprise could have meant anything else.

They rounded a corner and suddenly there was a great "Oooh!" from the rest of the students. Even Harry couldn't quite hold in his excitement. The sight was indeed, very impressive, even for one who was used to the beauty of the Chateau at Beauxbatons.

In front of them was a large black lake, whose ripples reflected the moon's glow, like liquid silver. On the other side, perched on a mountain, was a castle, with many spires and turrets, and on the tallest flag flew a standard. The image of which was hard to discern, but Harry could guess that it was the Hogwarts flag, with its four proud and famous symbols.

Right in front of them was several wooden boats, which bobbed up and down gently in the water.

"No more'n four to a boat!" Hagrid called, and there was a mad scrambling to board them. Harry took a boat with his main guard and a wide eyed first year, who looked torn between staring at Hogwarts and staring at Harry.

The boats then glided forward, and Harry fancied that he could see shapes in the water. One of the boys in the boat ahead held a hand out and started skimming the lake. Suddenly, a large tentacle emerged from the water and grabbed the boy around the waist, lifting him into the air. There were several screams and Hagrid could be heard shouting, "No Laken, put the boy down right now!"

The tentacle tossed the boy up into the air, and with a shout he began to fall towards the surface of the lake. In a flash, Harry's guard had his wand out, and he was slowly levitating the boy back into the boat. The squid descended back below the surface.

Hagrid sent his boat around next to the boy's who seemed to be in a bit of shock, "Are yeh alrigh', Lad?" Hagrid asked, whilst digging into his coat and bringing out a large hanky. The boy nodded, but accepted the hanky.

"There's the spirit lad. Though, you need to keep yer hand inside the boat. Old Laken, thought yer were playing with 'im. We almost had to fish yer out the lake, like tha' Creevey kid last year. Though it didn' cause 'im any 'arm."

Creevey? Where had Harry heard that name before? Oh right, the bookshop!

Soon, once everyone was calmed down after the ordeal, they made their way again. The boats passed through under the cliff and emerged at a tiny harbour on the other side. Then they were climbing up some stone stairs and approaching a large oak door. Hagrid raised his fist and knocked three times.

The door swung open, revealing a stern looking witch dressed in green, tartan robes. She adjusted her glasses and said, "You are late again, Hagrid."

"Sorry, Professor McGonagall. Had a bit of trouble with Laken."

McGonagall heaved a long suffering sigh and said, "I'll take them from here Hagrid."

Hagrid nodded his head, and disappeared into the castle and through a door which had a large volume of noise coming from inside. Harry guessed that inside were the rest of the students.

McGonagall led the students passed the door and into a little side chamber, where she gave a brief speech on the houses and the behaviour expected of the students. Then she gave the first years instructions to tidy up a little, and made her way over to Harry, who had been waiting patiently off to the side.

"Good Evening, Your Majesty."

"Good evening, Professor."

"I have a few instructions to give you. The rest will be explained after the feast tonight. I and whoever your head of house is, will take you to the Headmasters office then."

Harry nodded, to show he understood.

"Right then, Your Majesty will enter the hall with the rest of the first years, so that you may experience the ceremony in full. Then the first years will be sorted. You will be sorted afterwards. Your herald wished to be the one to announce you, but it is the schools tradition for the deputy headmaster or headmistress to announce any new students to the student body. Do you have any questions?"

"No, Professor."

She nodded once, before striding over to the rest of the students and calling for them to line up, "In an orderly fashion, please."

They all did so, and the next moment they were heading into the great hall, where a great number of eyes turned to look at them. Harry, who most of the eyes were directed at, tried to ignore it by looking at the marvellously enchanted ceiling. Harry wondered if one of the founders had been a natural enchanter or the four were just more skilled than most.

At the front of the hall, in front of the head table, was an old, bedraggled looking hat sitting on a stool. Harry watched the hat, so was not surprised when, what seemed to be a tear in the hat stretched open wide. Then the hat began to sing and Harry lost all doubts, that one of the founders had been a natural enchanter. By the words of the hat, Harry guessed that the enchanter had been Gryffindor.

Once, a thousand years ago,

Upon a highland green,

Four people had a vision,

And formed a merry team.

Their vision was of Hogwarts,

A school for all to learn,

And though they were so different,

They built it in their turn.

And when they were finished,  
They gazed upon the sight,  
Of Hogwarts many towers,  
Its stone so full of might.  
But then there came a problem,  
Of whom they were to teach.  
For now there came some arguments,  
There differs threaten them to breach.  
So Gryffindor, a dashing chap,  
Did pull me off his head,  
And said to them, "Why don't we,  
Just split them up instead".  
"I shall take the brave,  
The ones, whose courage holds,  
The rest of them are up to you,  
I care naught for but the bold."  
Then Ravenclaw took the clever,  
And Slytherin took the sly,  
And Hufflepuff did shake her head  
And stare up at the sky.  
"You are all so foolish,



To put children in a box,  
But then it makes no difference,  
For I will have the lot!  
I care not if they're ambitious,  
Like Salazar surely does,  
They have all got potential,  
With some hard work and trust"  
So there they are the Houses four,  
Split up from the first,  
And it's my job to sort you,  
And nothing could be worse.  
So I'll sort you as I've always done,  
But this my warning heed,  
For though you may be of one house,  
The other three you need.

The hall applauded; although Harry got the feeling that it was somewhat muted, after the sorting hats less than cryptic message.

McGonagall cleared her throat loudly, silencing the mutterings that had started up around the hall, and called up the first name on the list.

"Abercrombie, Euan."

An average looking boy, with very prominent ears stepped forward. It was the same boy who had almost fallen in the lake, and he still looked to be terrified.

The hat called Gryffindor though, and soon the rest of the names were being called, dwindling down the number of students until it was Harry's turn. He could practically feel the excitement bubbling in the air as his own nervousness grew.

Finally, McGonagall called, "Zeller, Rose" who was sorted into Hufflepuff, and Harry was alone in front of the hat.

Time seemed to slow down for a moment before McGonagall called, somewhat redundantly "His Majesty, The King."

Harry took a deep breath, before starting forward. He sat down on the stool which was much too small for his height, and the hat was placed on his head. The last thing he saw before, black cloth blinded his vision was people standing on the benches, straining to see him.

Harry heard a voice whisper in his ear, "Aha! There's courage here, and once a thirst to prove yourself... hmm interesting. Your goal has changed; you no longer wish to prove to yourself to your parents, but instead to the world. A very worthy ambition – but I see - you can not go into either of those two houses. They are perceived to be too much on one side of the great struggle. You wish to go somewhere more neutral. I see also a wish to distance yourself from your brother."

The hat shuffled a bit on his head, "But those two aren't the only houses. There's loyalty as well, perhaps to much loyalty. It is an admirable quality, but you should be careful not to misplace it, but I see you are learning. You have a good brain here, and an eagerness to learn... hmmm, where should I put you?"

Harry didn't know where he wanted to go. What he did know, was that he wanted to go somewhere where he perhaps wouldn't be constantly judged, or at the very least be with people he knew he could trust. The image of his Seneschals flashed through his mind, ending with Cedric Diggory.

The hat saw what he saw for he said, "Yes, your Seneschals will give you the support you need, and perhaps you of all people can change people's impressions. I think that I have seen enough, better be HUFFLEPUFF!"

There was a huge silence and then the table on the right erupted into loud applause. Harry relieved that it was over, made his way to the table, where a group of people who looked his age were hurriedly making room for him.

He sank down next to two boys, his guard taking station behind him, but the applause made no sign of abating and eventually Professor Dumbledore had to shoot loud bangs out of his wand to gain attention. Professor McGonagall was busy putting the hat away, but you could see a slight smile curving on her lips if you looked closely enough.

Professor Dumbledore's eyes twinkled brightly as he said, "Yes, well that was all very exciting wasn't it, and I am sure that all of you will make the new students very welcome indeed. I am sure that you are all very hungry, so I will keep it short. Nitwit! Blubber! Oddment! Tweak!"

The tables were soon groaning under the weight of the dishes as they were filled with all manner of different foods. Harry happily reached for the nearest platter, but was beaten to it by the boy on his left, who cheerfully filled his plate with food, then the people next to him and finally his own, all the while keeping up a cheerful monologue.

"Well, I say Your Majesty. I never expected to see you in Hufflepuff. I rather expected you to be in Gryffindor, if you don't mind me saying. That's not to say that I am not pleased to have you in our house, only it is rather a surprise. Isn't that right Ernie?" the boy said, addressing the last part at the boy on the other side of Harry.

Ernie puffed out his chest pompously and said, "Justin, I believe it is polite to introduce yourself before engaging in conversation."

Justin blushed slightly but otherwise seemed to wave off his embarrassment, "I say, dear chap, you are right! My apologies, it seems that I completely forgot myself. I am Justin Finch-Fletchley. The boy on the other side of you is Ernie Macmillan. Then we have Wayne Hopkins, Megan Jones, Susan Bones, Hannah Abbot, Sally-Anne Perks, Eloise Midgen, and over there being surly is Zacharias Smith."

"I am not being surly!"

The girl identified as Susan Bones patted him on the shoulder, "Yes you are Zacharias, but we love you anyway."

Zacharias harrumphed before turning back to his mashed potatoes.

Harry stared before turning to Ernie, "Aren't you best friends with Chris?"

Ernie looked taken aback and Hannah giggled, whilst Ernie said, "Certainly not. My best friend is Justin."

Justin blushed a bit, and then explained, "Chris and Ernie have a very unusual friendship, based around the fact that Chris is pants at Herbology and Neville Longbottom refuses to have anything to do with him. Otherwise I doubt that Chris would have anything to do with a Hufflepuff."

"That is unkind, Justin." said Ernie.

"But true." He said with an apologetic shrug.

"But Chris goes round to your house all the time in the holidays."

At this Hannah giggled again, and Ernie said, "That has a far easier explanation. Your brother has had a crush on Hannah for a very long time. Hannah spends a lot of time at my house and so the Prince finds excuses to come to my house as well. It really is sad, because, of course, Hannah is going out with Justin"

Harry glanced at Hannah, who was giggling. She really was quite pretty, but Harry found it very funny, that Chris, who always bragged about his girlfriends, couldn't have the one girl that he wanted.

He then glanced at Justin who was ducking his head, but had a very pleased smile on his face. Something about that expression reminded Harry of someone.

"I'm sorry Justin. Have we met before?"

"No sir, we have not, but you did meet mother over the summer, whilst over at the palace and I am told that I have her likeness. I dare say that meeting you rather reassured her. She's always been

a bit worried that I wouldn't fit in, in the wizarding world. My name was down for Eton before, and she was quite disappointed that I chose to come here instead. Of course she couldn't stop me, once father gave his support, and now I think, with a wizarding monarchy, that the idea is growing on her. I dare say that it took a while though."

"Oh, yeah! Now I remember. You do look a lot like her, and I am glad that I could help ease her mind a little bit."

Then the conversation turned to more amiable things where Harry found himself asking questions about the classes and teachers, much like the first years were doing further down the table.

"We haven't had the same Defence teacher two years running. This year we were supposed to be having Mad-Eye Moody, but he was drafted in as your guard. I don't know who they got as a replacement." Megan Jones was saying.

"I do," said Susan Bones darkly, "The foulest woman who ever walked the ministry. She's up there sitting next to Professor Snape, and I think even he finds the company repulsive."

Harry turned to look where she was pointing. There, wearing pink robes and a girlish ribbon on her toad like face, was a woman who Harry knew.

Dolores Umbridge.

Harry had just finished his last spoon of dessert, when the mountains of food disappeared, leaving the table clear and spotless. Professor Dumbledore stood up and there was a sudden, attentive hush.

Dumbledore smiled at the waiting students and clapped his hands together. "So! Now that we are all fed and watered, I must once more ask for your attention, whilst I give out a few start-of-term notices."

"Mr. Filch, our caretaker, has asked me to remind you that the list of forbidden items can be viewed in full in his office, so that there is no excuse for you to be carrying around items such as Dung Bombs, Fanged Frisbees or any of the numerous items that can be bought from Zonkos, (which you can visit in Hogsmeade or Owl Order from) or our own Mr. Weasleys, who are in their seventh and final year at Hogwarts."

There was a smattering of laughter around the hall and the corners of Dumbledore's mouth twitched, before he continued on a slightly more serious note. "As usual, the Forbidden Forest is, as the name states, forbidden to all students. Entry to the forest will result in severe penalties. On a lighter note, the second floor corridor is finally finished with all its renovations and so students are once again permitted to use it. I am sure Miss Myrtle will be pleased to have visitors again."

"It is also my sad duty to inform you that the inter-house Quidditch cup will not be taking place this year in its usual form..."

"What?" Harry gasped, but he was not the only one. Across the hall, exclamations of disbelief and anger were heard. Next to him Harry heard Justin mutter, "I dare say that this is a trifle disappointing. Quidditch is even better than Polo." To which Ernie nodded sympathetically.

Dumbledore however, seemed unfazed by the growing mutiny in the hall, instead he calmly raised his wand and shot out several loud bangs, drawing attention to him and smiling benignly. He cleared his throat and said, "This is due to an event that will be starting in October. It is my great pleasure to announce that this year; Hogwarts will be hosting the Triwizard Tournament..."

"You're joking!" A voice interrupted loudly from the Gryffindor table. Harry looked over to see Hermione Granger pulling down a widely grinning Fred Weasley.

"Indeed I am not Mr. Weasley, although I can understand the excitement. For those who do not know, and for those who do please indulge a few moments of silence whilst I explain, the Triwizard Tournament has not been held in over a century. It is meant to be a friendly competition between the three premier schools of magic in Europe – Hogwarts, Beauxbatons and Durmstrang. Traditionally three champions are selected by an impartial judge to represent their school in a series of dangerous tasks. The Tournament was disbanded after the death toll grew too high."

Funnily enough, the mention of a death toll did not seem to reduce the level of excitement in the hall. Harry's stomach however did a sickening lurch. Why did the mention of a death toll seem to fill him with dread? Possibly because Harry knew what his luck was like.

"We originally planned to have the Tournament last year; however it was cancelled at the last minute. Yet new found efforts to bolster international relations," at this he nodded in Harry's direction, "Has led to the decision to hold the Tournament again, but on a much wider scale."

Excited whispers grew. The Triwizard Tournament was legendary. To do it on a wider scale would be epic!

"The school will be represented by the three champions as usual. However the tasks will not be limited to them alone, nor will there only be three tasks. On top of the tasks there will also be debate competitions, other academic competitions and Durmstrang and Beauxbatons have graciously allowed us to join in on their inter-school Quidditch competition. All the tasks will take place throughout the year and will be designed to showcase and highlight the best and brightest of us all, whilst making closer ties to the witches and wizards on the continent."

Harry had been caught up in all the excitement of the Triwizard Tournament but he had a sudden realisation. Why hadn't he known about it before hand? Why wasn't he at Beauxbatons, when Hogwarts was going to be made so public? Anger bubbled in his

blood, but he quickly clamped down on it. It would not do to get angry without waiting for an explanation, but it would be on his list of questions at the meeting later. Dumbledore owed him some answers.

"For those who wish to join any of the academic teams, a full list of teams available will be posted on your common room notice boards tomorrow. If you wish to join then you must speak to the teacher listed as being in charge of choosing those teams. You may apply to as many as you wish, but be advised that each team will require a large amount of work and time, and you will be expected to maintain your grades in other subjects."

He issued a stern glare, lingering on Hermione Granger and several of the Ravenclaws who seemed eager to join all the teams if they could.

"The Champion chosen to represent the schools will, because of the nature of that commitment and the danger posed to them, have to be of age – that is to say, seventeen years old or older- and I will personally ensure that no underage student attempts to hoodwink our impartial judge. I cannot stress the importance of this as an underage student will not have the necessary training to complete the tasks. Younger students will still have their opportunity to shine in the academic competitions."

Harry was filled with elation at the mention of an age restriction. That meant that he couldn't join. Whilst competing would be fun, he had no intention of entering a possibly deadly competition just for some cash and glory. He had quite enough of both, thank you very much. Other people were not so pleased, although many appeared mollified when they were told that they could participate in other ways.

"Now for some other notices. We are delighted to welcome Professor Umbridge who will be taking over the Defence Against the Dark Arts class. She has graciously taken a year's leave from her position as Senior Undersecretary to the Minister in order to teach at this institution. She will also be serving as a liaison between us and the Ministry for the purpose of the tournament. If any of you have any problems in relation to students from other schools then it will be Professor Umbridge who will do her best to sort out those issues."



There was a round of faint, very unenthusiastic applause in which Harry did not bother to clap even once. He just glared at the toad woman, not caring to hide his disdain for her.

Dumbledore continued, "Now I am sure you are all very tired so just one round of the school so..."

He broke off, looking enquiringly at Professor Umbridge, and nobody understood why he had stopped speaking. Then she cleared her throat with a distinctive, "Hem, hem" and it became clear that she intended to make a speech.

Dumbledore sat down abruptly, folded his hands in his lap and looked for the world like he was actually interested in what she was going to say. In fact he was interested, although not at all pleased. He knew he wouldn't like what she was going to say at all.

"Thank you, Headmaster," Professor Umbridge simpered in her high pitched voice, which Harry so loathed, "For those kind words of welcome."

"Well, it is lovely to be back at Hogwarts, I must say! And to see such happy little faces looking up at me!"

Harry felt distinctly patronised. Looking around him, he knew he wasn't the only one. Zacharias Smith in particular looked like he had swallowed something very sour. Then again, he had looked like that for most of the evening.

"I am very much looking forward to getting to know you all and I'm sure that we will be very good friends!"

Harry could see Draco Malfoy rolling his eyes from across the hall.

Professor Umbridge cleared her throat again and continued, but the lightness from her voice was gone and instead it sounded cold and businesslike.

"The Ministry of Magic has always considered the education of young witches and wizards to be of vital importance. The rare gifts with which you were born may come to nothing if not nurtured and honed by careful instruction. The ancient skills unique to the wizarding community must be passed down the generations lest we

lose them forever. The treasure trove of magical knowledge amassed by our ancestors must be guarded, replenished and polished by those who have been called to the noble profession of teaching."

As she spoke giggles and whispers broke out through the hall, in a way that had never happened when Dumbledore made speeches. Her voice could not hold the attention of the hall. However, Harry and several other students did not look away, nor did the teachers. What Umbridge was saying was important.

"Every Headmaster and Headmistress of Hogwarts has brought something new to the weighty task of governing this historic school, and that is as it should be, for without progress there will be stagnation and decay. Progress, is the bulwark of our society, but as great as it is, it must be tempered with tradition. Tried and tested traditions often require no tinkering, and so progress for progress sake must be discouraged. There must be a balance between the two."

Harry spared a glance to the side where Ernie MacMillan was staring glassy-eyed at Umbridge. He was one of the few still pretending to listen. Over at the Gryffindor table a couple of boys had brought out a chess set, and were happily ignoring the oblivious Umbridge.

"Some changes, indeed most, will be for the better, while others will come, in the fullness of time, to be recognised as errors and so must be corrected. Meanwhile, some old habits will be retained, and rightly so, whereas others , outmoded and outworn, relics of a bygone era, must be abandoned to make room for a new age of openness and accountability, intent on preserving what needs to be preserved, perfecting what needs to be perfected and pruning wherever we find practices that ought to be gone." She smirked, "It is our job as educators to see that the correct changes and traditions are maintained and your job as students to learn what needs to be learned..."

Harry couldn't take it anymore and before he knew it he was standing. The giggles and whispers that had erupted during the course of the speech ebbed away and all turned to look at Harry.

Umbridge smiled, showing every one of her slightly pointed teeth and bobbed a curtsy. Harry knew that she was mocking him.

"Is there something you would like to add, Your Majesty?"

Harry felt the hand of his guard on his arm and so controlled his urge to start hurling curses at the vile woman.

"I hope, Professor," he spat, "that you are not implying that the Ministry seeks to interfere with the running of this fine institute of learning."

Umbridge affected an affronted look, "Certainly not, Your Majesty. The Ministry has no wish to interfere with Hogwarts."

Harry had the distinct impression that he had just been threatened. Umbridge's smile widened and the Headmaster cleared his throat, breaking the tension between the two.

"Well now, thank you very much for your lovely words from the Ministry. I am sure that the students found it most..."

Harry slowly sat down, feeling the eyes of the hall leaving him, though his own continued to watch Umbridge very carefully. His hatred for her was undeniable, and now he knew without any doubt that she was his enemy. Her words, as subtle as they were, were a clear declaration of intent. She was dangerous, but just how dangerous an enemy she would prove to be could only be found in time.

"Put some leg into it! You're training to be in the King's Guard not to be in the Ballet! Morgan keep your arm up! You just left your entire left side defenceless. Wilcoks! You just let your charge die! That's it, all of you are crap! Run laps until I see some improvement." shouted a voice from the training room.

"But Sir," a voice whined, "We've been here all day and are tired."

"Tired? I'll show you tired! Those who attack the King won't care just how tired you are. Just for that I'm going to add an extra hour onto your training time. You can all thank Mr. Adder for that extra time."

There was a collective groan, and Tonks entered the training room to see Moody standing in the centre, whilst ten recruits jogged laps around him. All of them were puffy and out of breath. Tonks found the sight vaguely amusing, remembering her own long hours in the training room. She had thought Moody a vindictive bastard then. The time spent had taken their toll and in the beginning she would go home so exhausted that she could not even change form, but gradually her endurance built up. She had still thought him a bastard though, until that training saved her life. Now she knew he was a bastard, and didn't care one bit about it.

Moody of course had noticed her before she even set one foot in the training room, and didn't bother taking his eyes off the recruits as he addressed her, "Got a reason for interrupting my session, Auror?"

Tonks dropped her bag in the corner of the room and took off her outer robes, so that she was left in shorts and t-shirt, "Wotcher, to you too Moody. I've come to get a bit of training in. You don't mind do you?"

"You want to join the greenies running laps?" he said with a gesture to the mentioned group.

"If you think that will help." she said with a smile as she began doing some stretches.

Moody snorted, "We'll see about that. Get over here. You lot stop running, and stand against that wall over there, I'm going to show you how real Aurors fight. Maybe that will get your heads out of your arses."

The group immediately did so. Some didn't bother to do some warning down stretches before collapsing against the wall. 'They're going to pay for that later' Tonks thought, because of course, Moody had seen them and he wouldn't let such laziness slide.

Tonks moved to stand opposite Moody taking stock of everything in the room as she did so and reverting back to her natural form as well. In a fight, she could not afford to be distracted by maintaining a form or to miscalculate how long her reach was, especially in a fight against someone like Moody.

"This is an instructional duel only Tonks. I intend for these greenies to learn something." which, in Moody speech meant anything goes. Thankfully Tonks knew how to speak Moody.

Tonks got into a duelling stance and within seconds was on the floor rolling to the side to avoid a spell. As she rolled she shot off her own spells in the place Moody was last, but he had already moved. For a guy with a peg leg, he was surprisingly agile, which Tonks already knew. This was why the spells she shot were not aimed to hit him, but rather the duelling dummies behind him.

Now Tonks wasn't good enough at animation to control so many dummies at once, and she knew better than to do something like that in a fight anyway. The trick in a duel was not to do any fancy spell work; because it didn't matter how powerful your spells were if you can't hit the person. The trick was to cast faster than the other person could cast, to limit their movement, and to trick them. So when Tonks cast a series of spells at the dummies, what she was actually doing was setting them on fire, and banishing them all in one movement.

Moody had to waste precious seconds banishing them away from him, during which time Tonks was already starting her next spell chain.

"Confringo! Obscuro! Orchideous! Silencio!

The first spell went wide as Moody dodged it at the last second. The second spell hit, but with Moody's magical eye was useless against him. The third spell hit, but the flowers were burnt away by the dummies and the fourth spell also missed because by then Moody had recovered his equilibrium and was casting his own spell chain.

Tonks had to growl as she dodged and shielded from Moody's rapid onslaught, she couldn't get a break in, as Moody was far more experienced with spell chains and had created more dangerous and powerful ones than she had. His wand movements and words flowed seamlessly into one other without apparent break. She needed a distraction.

She got a brief one when Moody paused just long enough to take a breath. Tonks used the opportunity to shout "Lumos" and a bright light burst from her wand, temporarily blinding Moody. It wouldn't

last long though, so without waiting a second she used her powers to change appearance so that she was identical to one of the greenies, and transfigured her clothes to match their uniform, and ran over to stand amongst them.

"Nox!" Moody shouted, and the light disappeared leaving Moody facing the wrong way. Moody looked around the room, not dropping his shield, which he must have raised as soon as she shouted Lumos. Tonks knew that he would be looking for the telltale marks of a disillusioned person or looking for a tiny, finger sized Tonks. Both tricks she had used before, although the tiny Tonks one had left her feeling out of sorts for days afterwards and she had not used it again. It rather felt like been squeezed in a box that was half the size of you.

Tonks fingered her wand impatiently waiting for an opportunity to cast a spell. Moody was in an excellent defensible position and she did not want to lose her advantage. Moody continued to look around and then he was facing the opposite way to her, and Tonks took her opportunity. The next thing she knew she was unconscious on the floor.

Tonks was woken up a second later to the sight of Mad-Eye looking down at her. She groaned, "What did I do wrong?"

"Not a huge amount. The spells in the spell chain were a bit weak and not much use against me, but you used your surroundings well. Your main mistake was with the Lumos spell. Not much use against a magical eye like mine. I saw every action that you took."

"Would have worked against somebody else." Tonks groused as she accepted his helping hand up.

"True, but chances are anyone else you were up against wouldn't care about hurting innocent bystanders or using them as hostages."

Tonks nodded her agreement. She couldn't really argue, and besides she'd only managed to beat Moody twice before and both times were probably more due to luck than skill. In any case she'd managed to work off some of that tension which she had been feeling.

Moody turned back to the watching class, "I think you've all learned something from that little display. At least I hope you have. Get out,

and be back first thing in the morning. Hopefully I'll see some improvement from you sorry selves."

They hurriedly left the room and no sooner had the door shut then chatter broke out amongst them. That left Moody and Tonks alone. Moody started to clean up the room a bit.

"They're not a bad lot." He said as he repaired the dummies, "Can't be, when I handpicked them from this year's batch of Aurors, but they have a long way to go. They'll make it in the end, if they can just get their heads out their arses and listen to what I have to teach them. I think it will take real battle to get them to do that though. This lot just don't know how to take it seriously."

Tonks walked over to where there were some weight machines and began to use them, "So make them take it seriously."

"There is a distinct shortage of battles Tonks and I don't want to kill them to teach them a lesson."

"Yeah, well, they haven't seen what we've all seen. I mean, I may have been a kid, but I still remember the war. This lot haven't, and anyway I wasn't talking about a real battle. Just put them in a simulation."

Moody paused from where he was getting rid of some ash, "That's not a bad idea. It may just scare the living gods out of them and Merlin knows that they need that. I'll set it up. Now that we've got that out the way, care to tell me what's being bothering you."

Tonks paused from lifting her weights for a second before continuing, "What makes you think that anything is wrong?"

"You interrupted my training session and practically asked to duel with me. Nobody does that for no reason."

She put down the weights and looked him directly in the eye, running a hand through her hair as she did so in agitation.

"I'm... Ok, you know about the job Bones has me working on?"

"Yes?"

"I want off."

"Care to explain why?" Moody asked, apparently unconcerned.

"I'm just not good enough. I mean, I discovered a large number of the corrupted Aurors, but we have no proof and without proof we can't do anything. Bones now wants me to lead a task force against them, to gather the evidence and then make the arrests, but how can I do that? I mean, most of these Aurors have had years worth of experience, and I just can't handle it."

"Now the question is what do you want me to do about it?"

Tonks looked up hopefully, "You can tell her to put someone else on the case instead of me."

"What makes you think I can tell her to do anything? She is the Head of the Department not me."

"You're Head of the King's Guard!"

Moody looked bemused, "So?"

"That makes you her superior!"

Now he just looked shocked, "No I'm not!"

"Yes you are! Or at the least you are her equal. She cannot order you to do anything and you can make requests of her and take from her department. You are answerable to the King alone. Anything you do is assumed to have been done in his name or for his safety. Didn't you realise?"

"No, I just thought it was a new commission and that I was just part of the department. It seems that I haven't been following my own doctrine very well if I am this ignorant about my responsibilities."

"So will you talk to Bones?" Tonks asked with a pleading expression.

"No."

"Why?"



Moody took a deep breath, "Because you are that good. I trained you myself, didn't I? It wasn't any of those other Aurors who have been working on this case for months, and it wasn't these other Aurors who now know the ins and outs of the people they are hunting. If Bones has put you in charge of this case it is because you are the best person for the job."

Moody started to walk towards the door, his leg making a loud thump with every step.

"Wait."

Moody paused and looked at her. Tonks looked both desperate and unsure, "Do you really think that I can do it?"

Moody smirked, "Like I said. I trained you, didn't I?"

The feast was over and the hall was beginning to empty. After saying a quick goodbye to his new housemates, Harry looked around, wondering where he was supposed to go. He didn't have to wait long because a woman with hands that showed she worked outdoors a lot was pushing through the crowd towards him. She had a large smile on her face, and a motherly air. Harry instantly liked her.

"Good Evening, Your Majesty. I am Professor Sprout, and your Head of House. I'll show you where we are meeting. I do hope it won't take too long. I like to be available on the first night. Some of the new students get a tad homesick, the poor dears." She nattered and began to lead Harry out of the hall and through several empty corridors.

"How are you enjoying Hogwarts so far?" she asked.

Harry shrugged, "Well enough. It is only the first night. I'm sure I'll be able to give a better answer once I've had some of the classes."

Professor. Sprout hmmd, "I'm sure you'll adjust quite quickly, dear," she wasn't one to use formal titles on what she considered her charges, "You can always come to me if you have any problems or just want someone to talk to. The prefects will also help – but of course! Cedric Diggory is your Seneschal isn't he?"

"Thank you for the offer, but I am sure I will be fine." Harry said.

"Just the same though, the offer stands. I like my students to have the support that they need. We, Hufflepuffs must stick together."

They had reached an extremely ugly stone gargoyle, and Professor Sprout stopped abruptly in front of it. Harry looked at it in confusion, and then shrugged. This was clearly a passageway of sorts. Professor Sprout started to murmur something that sounded like "Ice Mi" but before she could finish what she was going to say, the gargoyle hopped to one side. Professor Sprout looked taken aback for a moment, before looking at Harry, and coming to a conclusion.

"I suppose Hogwarts recognises you," she said with a small laugh. "Come along then."

They stepped onto a spiral staircase that started to move as soon as they were on it and take them upstairs. Harry glanced behind him and saw that the gargoyle had moved back into place.

Soon enough they had reached the top and the staircases stopped moving in front of a large wooden door. Professor Sprout knocked gently before opening the door. Professor Dumbledore stood smiling behind his desk, whilst Chris and Glory both sat in seats in front of it. Professor McGonagall was also in attendance. All had turned to look as they entered.

"Ah! Welcome Your Majesty. Please take a seat. I dare say that you are tired and probably don't want to be in a meeting all night. Would you care for a lemon drop?"

"Err. No thank you, professor. I'm not that hungry."

"Suit yourself." Said Dumbledore and popped a lemon drop into his mouth.

Harry took a seat in between Glory and Chris, and waited patiently for Dumbledore to begin.

"Now that we are all here, we can begin. Is there any questions that you have before we start?"

There were several questions Harry had. He decided to start with the most pressing. "Why is the Triwizard Tournament being held? The only reason that I am attending Hogwarts is because of the security concerns posed by Beauxbatons being so open to the public?"

Dumbledore folded his hands together, "I understand your frustration. However we decided to hold the tournament only after Your Majesty had already agreed to attend this institution. It was also instigated on the French side of the waters. However, even with the tournament being held, Hogwarts is still far safer and better equipped to handle the public. I remain firm in my belief that Hogwarts is the safest place for you."

'The French organised it?' Harry thought. Well, that did explain things, and Harry whilst annoyed, was beginning to warm to the idea. It would give him an opportunity to still see all of his friends and maybe even join in some of the classes and clubs that Hogwarts didn't offer. He still had a few concerns though.

"How come I wasn't informed about it before now? I tell you, Professor that I was not amused to find out during the feast."

"That I do not know Your Majesty. I can only assume that the politicians believed it to be beneath your personal notice. It is a school matter after all. I am sure that they considered other issues to be of far more import." Dumbledore explained.

That did make sense, although it still irked Harry because it affected him personally. However he knew it would be impossible to know absolutely everything that went on in his various Kingdoms. The best he could hope for was to be advised well and to be able to delegate to people he could trust.

Harry decided to move onto his next issue, "On the train my Seneschals were called into a meeting with the prefects. May I inquire as to why?"

Dumbledore's eyes twinkled, "Of course you may inquire, and I will do my best to answer. Your Seneschals will at times have responsibilities to you that may interfere with some of the school rules. An example would be if you summoned them after curfew for some important matter of state. This isn't a problem for those who

are prefects because they are already entitled to be out in the evening. A solution to this was to give your Seneschals the same privileges that the Prefects enjoy. One of the main benefits of this is that they are now allowed to enter any of the Common Rooms. We will however be carefully monitoring them to make sure that this privilege is not abused, but it is my firm belief that we won't have any problems."

That would be helpful and Harry was glad that Dumbledore had had the foresight to arrange that.

"Do we have the same privileges?" Glory asked slyly.

"Of course you do, my girl. Chris already did as Prefect, but I could hardly extend the courtesy to the Seneschals and not the Royal family."

Glory and Chris exchanged pleased looks and Harry silently groaned.

"Headmaster, I do believe that we should get on to the planned purpose of the meeting. It is getting on in the evening." Professor McGonagall interjected pointedly.

"Right you are, right you are." Dumbledore said whilst shuffling some papers around on his desk. "Well the first thing on the agenda is to discuss sleeping arrangements. I have set aside a private set of rooms for you to share. The two lads can share one room and Glory can have the other. There is also a small seating area and an office attached, plus a spare room where the guards can sleep when not on duty. I believe that should fulfil all your security needs." He smiled benignly.

Harry had a moment of panic. Share a room with Chris! That would never do. They would kill each other or else drive each other mad. Just sharing a suite with him would be bad enough. Chris and Glory also seemed to be having the same thoughts, by the aghast looks on their faces.

"But Professor," Chris blurted, "Couldn't we... you know... have our own rooms, completely separate from each other. Only, Harry is sure to have guests at times and he's going to have loads of paperwork to do. We wouldn't want to distract him."

It was a good excuse. Too bad Dumbledore wasn't buying it. He frowned and said, "I'm afraid I can't do that. With the tournament being held, Hogwarts is going to have a number of guests in residence and we simply do not have the space to house you separately. No, you will just have to buck up and make do."

Chris looked ready to complain, but Harry started talking before he was able to. There was no way that Harry was going to be staying with his siblings for a whole year!

"Err Professor. I have a request. I'd actually quite like to sleep in the dorms with my classmates. It will be hard enough to integrate into this new environment without taking additional measures which separate me from my peers."

That seemed quite viable and Dumbledore did seem to be considering it. Harry's guard shifted behind him. Harry got the impression that unlike Dumbledore, he did not like the idea at all.

"How would your security arrangements work if we did that?" Dumbledore asked directing the question at Harry's guard. Harry turned around in his seat and looked up at his guard who was frowning in thought.

"Sir, normally we would have one guard stationed directly outside his room. However if His Majesty is to be sharing a room, then it will be necessary to have at least one guard in the room with the King."

"I don't much like the sound of that!" Professor Sprout exclaimed loudly, "Won't it be possible for His Majesty to stay in the Head Suite. Adrian Pucey is the Head Boy this year and he's not a Hufflepuff, so they should be available."

Professor McGonagall was nodding and Harry liked the sound of that solution but unfortunately Professor Dumbledore shook his head and said, "Unfortunately Professor, you have forgotten that a ghoul has taken up residence in the Hufflepuff Head Suite. It would be terribly unfair and inconvenient to have to move it."

Professor Sprout brightened and said, "Oh yes! Old Gunter does get terribly upset when we try and move him. He sulks for days and gets ten times more destructive. No it would be best to leave him." She

turned to Harry and said, "Gunter's a bit of a Hufflepuff mascot. We've cast silencing charms on his room so you can't hear him in the evening; Merlin knows why he chose to live there though. It is hardly the normal ground for a Ghoul, but then Gunter is a Hufflepuff."

"The sorting hat gave him an honorary place in the house three or four years ago," said McGonagall in explanation.

Harry took it all in stride. He had heard stranger things than having a ghoul as a mascot. Still, he had yet to find out where he was to sleep and he was getting tired.

"I suppose that His Majesty will have to sleep in the dorm then and the other boys will just have to get used to the idea of a guard in the room with them." Dumbledore said finally. "If this proves to be a problem then His Majesty can still move in with Chris and Glory, who from their silence I take are going to take advantage of the private room."

The two of them nodded emphatically.

"Your Majesty will still have access to the private room for official purposes. It wouldn't do for state secrets to be left lying around where anyone can see them." His mouth twitched in amusement.

"Thank you, Professor. Is there anything else?"

"Yes as a matter of fact, there is one last issue for us to discuss. It is Hogwarts policy for titles and such to not be recognised in relation to school issues. This is the reason why you will hear students like Lord Longbottom being referred to as Mr. Longbottom within these halls. In your case, this is impossible as Hogwarts cannot refuse to recognise the King." Then Dumbledore smiled. "In fact, I believe the school itself also recognises you, if I am not mistaken."

Harry thought back to when the gargoyle had jumped aside for him and had to acknowledge the point.

Dumbledore cleared his throat, "So you see we have a dilemma which only Your Majesty can solve. As King you are above any laws and rules and cannot be reprimanded, but you are also a student here and must be held to account in that regard."

Harry saw what point Dumbledore was trying to make and hurried to assure him, "Professor, I agree to follow the rules and regulations of the school as a regular student insofar as my position will allow. There will be times when my responsibilities mean that I must do things that other students cannot and for that you must excuse me. Other than that though, I expect to be treated as a regular student. If I break the rules, I wholeheartedly expect to get a detention just like anyone else." Harry grinned.

"I did hope you would say that, dear boy... that is to say, Your Majesty. I'm afraid it would be quite a difficult dilemma for us if you had not done so."

His eyes twinkled again and then he suddenly exclaimed, "Look at the time. It is getting very late. If you don't have anymore questions then I suppose that I best let your Head of Houses lead you to your rooms or else you'll be falling asleep in my office. Are there any more questions then? Very well, off you trot!"

With that the meeting was concluded and Harry found himself being led out of the room by Professor Sprout who was looking at her own watch in dismay.

"That went far longer than I had hoped, though not as long as I expected what with so much to talk about! But it's far too late now to give a welcoming speech to my Hufflepuffs. Most of the younger years will be in bed asleep. I'll just have to do it tomorrow instead, but I do hope the Prefects have settled the first years in with no problems. There are always a few who have difficulty – but no, I will have to trust them to do their job and if there was a problem that they couldn't handle they knew where to find me. But look at me, nattering on like this when you are dead on your feet. I suppose, if I am honest that I am just so pleased to have you in my house. It says a lot about your character if I do say so, but of course I shouldn't be biased." She gave a little wink to Harry.

He followed her all the way to the Common Room, his Professor keeping a steady commentary all the way. Harry learnt a wealth of information from her as she talked, and also found his nerves, which he had not even realised were there, melting away. He quickly realised that that was the Professor's intention and his admiration for her went right up.

They steadily made their way downwards and soon Harry found himself beneath ground level in front of a very life like painting. Professor Sprout said to him, "This is the entrance to the Common Room. You just have to say the password to enter, although I think it just might let you in without it. The password is, 'Clabbert'."

As she said it the painting swung open and allowed them into the common room. Harry stepped inside and was followed by Sprout. It was largely empty, although a few students were left mingling about. A fire burned merrily in the corner and was surrounded by large, comfy looking couches and sofas. Small tables and chairs were dotted around the room as well. Harry's first impression was that it was very homey, with its low ceiling with wooden beams across it and walls lined with shelves full of books, and small ornaments which combined to give the room a lived in look without taking away any of the comfort or practicality.

Directly across from Harry were four perfectly round wooden doors, painted yellow. One of the doors was slightly ajar and Harry could see a corridor decorated in the same way as the common room going downwards. It was lined with sconces, and the light from it made the corridors seem to be uncommonly pretty.

It was to these doors that Professor Sprout gestured and said, "Those doors lead to the dorm rooms and bathrooms. The ones on the left lead to the girls' rooms, and the ones on the right lead to the boys. The oldest ages are on the outside with the youngest in the middle. Your room will have the correct year group written on it. Would you like me to show you? The house-elves should have moved your things by now."

Harry who had just spotted Cedric Diggory smiled and said, "No thank you Professor. I think I can manage."

Professor Sprout replied, "Have a good night then and remember that my door is always open," before leaving the Common Room.

Harry walked over to where Cedric was sitting with a few of his friends. He was very tired but he figured that he should probably say a few words to Diggory before going to bed.



Diggory spotted Harry as he approached and got up to offer him a bow, smiling broadly.

"Well done, Your Majesty, for getting into what is without a doubt the best house in Hogwarts."

"Come now Diggs," one of his friends exclaimed, "Was there ever any doubt?"

The two burst out laughing and Cedric said to Harry, "I think you surprised everyone with that sorting, Sire."

Harry nodded and stifled a yawn, "Yeah," he said, covering his mouth with his hand, "There is going to be hell to pay tomorrow."

Cedric frowned and said suddenly rather seriously, "You know that I will have your back don't you?"

"Yeah I do, but don't worry I think I can handle the backlash. I prepared for this eventuality."

"You knew you were going to get into Hufflepuff?" Another of Diggory's friends asked incredulously before tacking on at the end, "err Your Majesty?"

"No, I mean I didn't really know what house I would get into, but I knew that every house would probably have a negative response, except maybe Gryffindor. Actually, even Gryffindor would have had a response."

"Actually," Cedric cut in, "Most people expected you to be a Gryff. Potters are always Gryffs. If you had been sorted there, no one would have batted an eye lid."

"Maybe," Harry said, and ran a hand through his hair, "Anyway, I'm going to go to bed. Goodnight."

"Goodnight," came a chorus of responses as Harry left through one of the round doors.

He followed the corridor round until he came to a door with 'fifth years' labelled onto it. He entered, finding everyone already asleep in their large, yellow four-poster beds. The only one left was the one

nearest the door, and Harry recognised his trunk at the end of it. He changed into his pyjamas and collapsed onto the bed, snuggling deeply into the duvet.

Soon his eyes began to droop and his breathing deepened. Then he was asleep, and his first day at Hogwarts was at an end.

Despite getting back so late, Harry awoke early. Not so early that the sun was yet to rise, which he was grateful for, but early enough that Harry was pretty sure that most of the castle was still asleep. Certainly his dorm mates were, at least.

Harry decided to take advantage of this fact, instead of lazing around in bed, which most other teenagers in the same situation would do. He slowly got out of bed, allowing his feet to sink into the plush rugs that covered the stone floor.

"My Lord?" whispered the guard, and Harry motioned for him to relax.

Harry grabbed his toiletries and went into the bathroom. In a sense, it was a good thing that Harry was such an early riser, as it meant that he wasn't interfering with the other boys established morning routine. It wouldn't be a good start to begin a conflict over who uses the shower at what time in the morning.

The bathroom was nice, and functional, if more plain than what Harry was used to from Beauxbatons. Harry got into the shower and allowed the scalding water to wake him up, and wipe away the stress from the last few weeks. It may be a new school, but school itself was something Harry was used to. It was routine and comfort.

Harry spent a long time in the shower so when he finally emerged the other boys were already up.

"Good grief!" said Justin as Harry emerged from the bathroom with a towel wrapped around his waist. "Not that I am not pleased to see you, but what are you doing here, Your Majesty?"

Harry started to rummage through his trunk (thinking he really ought to unpack some time that day) looking for his clothes before noticing that they were already laid out on his bed for him. Harry stared for a minute before realising that one of the guards must have done it whilst he was in the shower.

"I am a Hufflepuff," said Harry as he pulled on some underwear.

Zacharias who was busy looking in a mirror and pulling a comb through his hair snorted. Justin gave him a mild look of reproach

before saying, "I know that, Your Majesty. I meant, that I rather thought you would have your own private accommodation."

"I do, or I did. I chose not to use it, although I still have use of the office." Harry said vaguely. He saw no need to air the reasons why he didn't want to use it.

Justin shrugged in understanding and carried on getting dressed. Harry started rummaging around for his book bag and wondered just which ones he would need. They hadn't been given the timetables already had they?

He asked the other boys about it as Ernie headed into the bathroom. Justin answered, "No, Sire. The timetable is given out at breakfast on the first day. I'd bring all my books with me, just to be safe."

"Speaking of breakfast." Zacharias snarked through the bathroom door to Ernie, "Don't you have to be down in the common room to show the firsties the way. I know that is what I would do if I was a prefect."

Harry sensed a little bit of resentment there. Wayne gave a long suffering sigh, as Ernie shouted back something that was probably "Not for another ten minutes, and stop being bitter." but sounded more like, "Nos ferr a'wofer 'en 'i'uses, 'nd sop been 'isser." He was brushing his teeth at the time.

Justin started laying into Zacharias and Zacharias started back at him.

Wayne turned to Harry and said, "May I just say, Your Majesty, thank the Lord, that you are sharing a room now. If I had to go another year by myself with this lot, then I think I'd either kill myself or them."

"...get better grades than he does!"

"Are they always like this." said Harry with an air of foreboding.

"...If you were slightly less...less...bad tempered!..."

Wayne laughed, "No. Well, not quite this bad. Ernie and Justin are fine by themselves, and Zacharias can be cool most of the time as

well. He's just in a bad mood, because he is one of the top students in the year and so thinks he should be a prefect. He'll get over it in a week or two." He shrugged.

"Why do you have to get involved, when it is none of your business?"

"He is my friend and I am sick of the snide comments..."

"Do you think I should break this up?" Harry said to Wayne.

Wayne nodded, "Might as well. They'll not stop arguing otherwise. I'm going down to the common room, to meet the girls. Do you want us to wait for you?"

"Yes, please. Hopefully, I can bring the others down as well."

Wayne nodded again, went to leave the room, remembered to bow on the way out, which was slightly awkward for both of them, and then left. Harry turned to face the two boys, just as they started on insulting the others' mothers. In other circumstances the comments they were coming out with may have been amusing. For Harry, it was a sure sign that the argument had gone on long enough.

"If you two are quite finished?" he said loudly.

The two boys jumped and whirled around to face him, before Justin started blushing heavily. Zacharias also, was red, although that was probably less due to embarrassment and more due to the prior anger. Harry decided to ignore that.

Harry stared at them for a few moments expressing his displeasure through that look, and only relented when Ernie emerged from the bathroom.

Finally he nodded and said, "I will see you down in the common room in a few minutes. I trust that you can get dressed in that time without arguing."

"Yes, Your Majesty." said Justin, and Zacharias murmured the same a few moments later.

Harry looked at them one last time before leaving the room.

The Hufflepuffs headed to breakfast in a group. It was a Hufflepuff tradition that breakfast was to be eaten with your year mates. Any other meal could be eaten separately, but since your house was supposed to be your family it was important that the year mates had an opportunity to bond and chat outside of a classroom environment, and in a close to normal family environment. It was also an opportunity for the teachers to observe if there were any problems in the dynamics of the groups.

Harry thought that the real reason was to make sure that everyone got up on time.

Nevertheless he followed the tradition when it was explained to him. It helped that he did not know his way around the castle at all, and so was required to follow someone or else get hopelessly lost.

Sitting down to breakfast he quickly established certain key characteristics of his class. The most obvious was that Susan Bones was not a morning person. She had growled all the way down, glaring at anyone who so much said a good morning to her, irrespective of rank. The others had shrugged it off, obviously being used to it, but Harry had been quite taken aback. That is, he was until Justin had quietly whispered to him that Susan had likely enough not even realised who she had growled at. As soon as they sat down a cup of steaming tea was shoved into her hands, and she sat there nursing it for about ten minutes, whilst the rest of the school started to trickle in.

Once most of the school had arrived, and Harry had been given his timetable (Arithmancy first thing in the morning, followed by Ancient Runes! Ouch!), he was startled by an incoming flood of owls. He of course knew that owls delivered mail at breakfast, but he was surprised by the sheer number of them. Judging by his fellow Puff's expression they as well were surprised.

The reason for the number became apparent as soon as a distinguished barn owl landed in front of him, extending a leg which had a rolled up paper attached. He took it first, unrolled it and then threw it away in disgust after seeing the bold 'Special Edition: The King's Shocking Sorting' with his picture underneath.

At Ernie's quizzical look he said, "I see no reason to justify my placement or read the drivel that they are printing about me. Hufflepuff is a worthy house and should not be disparaged." He raised his voice so it could be heard audibly over the din of the Great Hall, "I am proud to be a Hufflepuff."

There was a moment of silence before excited chatter once again broke out. Harry took the next letter, even as he noticed that the bacon that had been on his plate had been stolen by a cheeky owl. The letter itself he recognised as being from his parents.

He opened it, skimmed it, and then tore it up and set it on fire. He looked at his guard.

"I suppose that these are all letters either congratulating me on my sorting or otherwise?"

The guard looked at the host of waiting owls. "I imagine so, Your Majesty."

Harry nodded decisively, "I won't be able to read them all now. Have them sorted and taken to my office so that I may peruse them at my pleasure."

It was done, and within seconds the owls were gone, and the letters as well... but not before more of Harry's bacon was stolen.

Harry was in a break between two classes when he was accosted in the corridors. By accosted I actually mean that he was politely hailed down, but after two hours of gruelling intellectual work that had completely exhausted him any and all interruptions were highly unwelcome.

However he placed a smile on his face diplomatically and the smile turned into a genuine one when he noticed it was his somewhat stuck-up Seneschal.

"Your Majesty." He bowed, "I trust you slept well, and how are you enjoying Hogwarts."

Malfoy was strictly formal as always. Harry in contrast shrugged, leaned against a wall and yawned widely not bothering to cover his yawn with his hand.

Draco couldn't help the frown of disapproval, but he pursed his lips and didn't comment on it.

Harry said, "The classes are fine. The Arithmancy is a little ahead of where I was at, but I have been told that I am ahead in other areas so I will have plenty of time to catch up. I just wish that I had got enough sleep last night. I didn't get out of a meeting with the Headmaster until later then I would have wished."

"How come? If you don't mind me asking, Your Majesty." He added hurriedly, remembering that the King's business was his own, and he shouldn't question him. Thankfully Harry had no problems answering.

"It's this Triwizard business. I was not happy finding out about it at the feast."

Draco was taken aback, "You didn't know!"

"You did?"

Draco nodded, "Of course I knew. Father told me all about it."

Harry ruthlessly suppressed his irritation, "Why didn't he tell me?"

Draco did look perturbed, and tilted his head in thought. "I don't know. I would guess that he assumed that someone else had informed you."

Harry snorted, "Clearly not, although Dumbledore expressed the opinion that someone thought it was beneath my notice."

He then proceeded to tell Draco the entire conversation from the night before, with only occasional interruptions and an outpouring of sympathy when Harry told how it was Dumbledore's initial plan to have him share a room with Chris. When he was finished though, Draco's reaction was not quite what Harry expected.

"You should have said, 'we'," he said pensively.



"Huh?"

"When you were expressing your anger at Dumbledore, you should have said 'we' rather than 'I'. That would have been the more appropriate reference to Your Majesty's self," he said more firmly.

"How come?" asked a confused Harry, slightly taken aback at Draco's seriousness but willing to humour him.

Draco for his part had to resist the temptation to look at the ceiling and sigh in long-suffering. That would not have been very Malfoy like behaviour.

"To refer to both state and self, one must say 'We' as it is plural."

Harry blinked, "Why would I refer to the state when it was just I who was not informed?"

Draco stared at Harry straight in the eye, and breaking protocol put both his hands on his shoulders, holding him in place. He said fiercely, "You are the state, Your Majesty. You represent it wholly and completely. Your views are the state's views; your strength, its strength. You and the state cannot be distinguished. When you are angry or insulted, so the state is as well. It is for that reason that 'We' would have been the proper term."

He held his gaze for a moment more, allowing the message to sink in. Harry gulped.

After a long moment, Draco released Harry's shoulders and he nervously started straightening his robes. He was glad that they were relatively alone as he would not have wanted anyone to witness Draco's declaration.

"So...'We' it is then. I'm afraid that I am rather unused to referring to myself in that manner. I might slip up from time to time." He managed a slight laugh.

Draco smirked widely and took a step back, asking Harry if he wouldn't mind walking with him as otherwise they would be late for the next class. As they walked he said, "I suggest, Your Majesty that you get used to using it by practicing it even when there is no call

to." Then he continued in a very Malfoyish vein, "Father always said that practice leads to perfection and a Malfoy must always be perfect. Since we serve your Majesty, then necessity dictates that you also must be perfect."

He continued on for a few minutes until they had to separate. Harry left in a considerable better mood.

It was on his way to lunch when Harry saw Ron. He had been talking to Susan Bones and Hannah Abbot, (both of whom were in his Ancient Runes class), when he saw him, hobbling along the corridor, and chatting to Hermione Granger. He quickly excused himself. He wanted to speak to Ron, but he was keener to speak to Hermione. After their meeting in Diagon Alley, Harry had not had a chance to talk to her. He wanted to see if any of her views had changed.

The two saw Harry approach and bowed. Harry waved aside their bows and greeted them as Ron asked the same question that Draco had earlier. Having already vented, Harry didn't feel the need to complain to Ron, instead saying he was doing, "Fine."

Ron then proceeded to introduce Hermione, "I don't think you've met Hermione Granger, Your Majesty. She is one of the top students in the school and a Gryffindor."

Harry smiled, took Hermione's hand and kissed it. He had noticed Malfoy a short distance away and knew that he was watching. Malfoy had taken it upon himself to attempt to teach him decorum. Harry complied, but only because Draco would go into such fits over the state of the crown and the importance of image if he did not. He would send such mournful looks, that he felt that he had to in order to shut him up. Harry did care about etiquette, and agreed that it was important (he went to Beauxbatons after all) but the level that Draco could take it to was quite obsessive.

Harry did like the way that Hermione blushed when he kissed her hand though.

"Actually, I met His Majesty right before the Ritual in Diagon Alley. Although, I suppose that Your Majesty has already forgotten all about me."

"How could I...we forget you, Hermione? You expressed such interesting views!" he said, remembering to say 'We' instead of 'I' at the last moment.

Harry grinned and Hermione's hand flew up to her mouth. "Oh dear. I did...how can... are you?"

She was quite tongue tied, which gathered by Ron's bemused expression was not a normal occurrence for the bushy-haired witch. He decided to go easy on her, "Relax, Hermione. We are not offended."

Now Ron looked intrigued, but Hermione regained her voice, "I'm so sorry, Your Majesty..."

"Harry." Harry interrupted firmly.

"I...what?"

"We wish you to call us Harry, when we are in less formal occasions. We are friends after all. That goes for you as well Ron."

Ron bowed at the compliment paid to him, and Hermione also took a moment to gather herself.

"Thank you very much, You... Harry. I still need to apologise though. When I expressed my views they were in...Ignorance, "she choked out, not liking to admit that she was wrong. "I have read a lot since then, and spent time researching and now have a much better grasp on the materials. Honestly, those things should be covered in History or there should be some sort of Muggle Orientation. I don't like being ignorant about things that Wizards and Witches take for granted knowing."

Harry was about to respond, thinking it was a bloody good idea, when he was interrupted by a dreamy voice.

"Your Majesty, I have something for you."

Harry turned around to see Luna Lovegood, clutching in her hand a newspaper.

"Your Majesty. I noticed this morning that you didn't read the newspaper..."

Harry's eyebrows rose. She was observant to have noticed that.

"...and I thought you might like to look at this newspaper instead. It's the Quibbler. I'm a reporter for it..." she puffed out her chest, "and Daddy is the editor. It's full of such interesting articles about such wonderful creatures like the Crumple-Horned Snorkack..."

Hermione couldn't resist, "Oh, honestly, Luna. Those creatures are not real. It is insane of you to think otherwise. Harry doesn't want your stupid tabloid."

Luna for just a second had an expression of profound hurt on her face before covering it up with her usual serene expression. Nobody else noticed, but Harry did.

He turned a fierce glare on Hermione, "Don't call Luna insane, and we can speak for ourselves thank you very much. We are not amused..."

For some inexplicable reason, Hermione's lips started to twitch. At his expression it turned into full on laughter. He was incredulous. He was telling her off, and she was laughing? Worse still, they were attracting some attention.

He was saved from having to redeem the situation by Luna, "I think she is insane, Your Majesty. She's always telling me that creatures are not real, when I know that they are, and she's always so logical, but not the good sort of logic. It's quite sad really. I think she has finally cracked from all the Nargles flying around her head. She has the worst case I have ever seen. Are you alright Hermione? Do you need to see the nurse, or perhaps go to Saint Mungo's? I have a fabulous remedy for infections by the..."

Hermione waved off the concern, "No, I am quite alright. I am sorry Luna, I didn't mean to offend you, and Your Majesty I wasn't laughing at you, I was laughing at..."

She cracked up again and it took several minutes before the tears stopped rolling down her cheeks. "I'm sorry, Your Majesty." She was able to say with somewhat contrition. "It's just; when you said 'We

are not amused' it reminded me of Queen Victoria, and her famous saying."

Ron, Harry, and Luna exchanged confused looks, before Ron said, "Which Queen was Victoria?"

Hermione threw her hands up in the air and muttered 'Wizards.' Harry decided to let the entire incident pass.

Harry hadn't noticed at first, being concerned with classes, (McGonagall was strict but fair, Sprout was kind, Snape was a git (But had apparently mellowed down his vitriol for Harry, probably because he couldn't get away with being as awful as he wished to be) and Harry had fortunately not had a class with Umbridge yet) but he was becoming increasingly aware that he was, as much as he might wish to deny it, being watched.

Now Harry as King was used to being watched. People upon seeing him could not help but stare in fascination. He was the King and the first King in such a long time. There was a feeling of awe around him.

This was not the same. This might not be a malicious sort of watching, but neither was it entirely innocent. Harry would feel eyes on him as he moved through the corridors, or sat at meal times, but he would look up and there would be nothing.

One time he had thought that he had seen who it was, but he had blinked and the figure had been gone before he could be certain. He had not seen the figure at all since then, even passing in the corridors, and he wondered whether it was his mind playing tricks on him.

He felt paranoid, but at the same time he could not shake off the feeling. He dared not say anything to anyone. It was just in his mind. He was certain of it.

But after two days of the constant feeling he felt like he had no more choice. Entering the Great Hall at dinner, he spotted Ron Weasley sitting next to Hermione and Neville. Instead of going towards the Hufflepuff table, (he tried to sit there as often as possible to integrate himself in the class dynamics) he headed straight for them, gesturing for the other Seneschals to join him.

At his approach, Ron and the others rose and made the surrounding students move to make room. They did, but not without a few grumbles. Harry, quite frankly couldn't care less about their complaints.

He sat down with a heavy thump and as soon as the others were seated he got right to the point, speaking in a low voice so as not to be overheard.

They shared concerned looks, even the twins who found it hard to be serious for any length of time. It was Ginny who stated what they must all have been thinking.

"Are you sure, Your Majesty?"

Harry opened his mouth to respond angrily but was beaten as she hurriedly continued, "It's just, it is a new school and Your Majesty might just be stressed."

"We are sure," said Harry in a terse voice.

They all looked at each other again, before Cedric (being the most responsible out of all of them) said, "Right, then we best find out who is doing it and put a stop to it."

He also clearly didn't believe him if the expression on his face was any indication, but his loyalty to Harry meant that even if he disagreed he would follow the King's wishes.

Draco however was not one to let it go. If the King commanded of course he would follow, but he had to be sure, and wasn't it the Seneschal's job to ease the King's concerns? Surely expressing such paranoid fancies were a sign of insecurity and instead of feeding the insecurities they should do their best to rid the King of his concerns.

So decided he opened his mouth and said, "But, Your Majesty, people watch you all the time. It is nothing to be concerned about."

Harry opened his mouth to retort but again was beaten to it.

"Malfoy, Harry said that it was not the same feeling and I think we should listen to him."

Malfoy bristled with rage. How dare she? What right did she have to disagree with him, who was only looking out for the King's best interests? She shouldn't even be sitting amongst them as she was certainly not a Seneschal. In his anger, it did not occur to him that if Harry had had an objection to her presence he would have said so.

"Who are you to interfere and how dare you address the King by his given name, Mudblood?" Draco said with a sneer.

Harry stopped playing with his food and looked up so sharply that Ron – who had been leaning forward- had to jump back to avoid clashing heads. His face was twisted into a mighty scowl.

"Don't you ever, ever use that word again!" he hissed.

Draco looked confused, "I don't understand. She's just a Mudblood. She should know better than to speak in the presence of her betters."

"Oh! My apologies, My Lord, I did not realise that I, as a halfblood, am so far beneath you. I beg for your forgiveness," and Harry stood up executing an elaborate, mocking bow towards Malfoy, and refused to rise from it.

Draco, by now had realised his fatal error and gulped audibly. The Great Hall had gone quiet and all eyes were on him and the still bowing King. He needed to do something and fast. He fell to his knees before Harry.

"Your Majesty, please, I beg of you, do not bow before your stupid, unworthy servant. I beg your Gracious Majesty to forgive this foolish wretch, who dared to presume to be greater than your royal self; who dared to imply that Your Majesty is less than your humble servant. My Dread and Sovereign Lord, please forgive me, even as I do not deserve your forgiveness."

Harry, who had risen as soon as Draco had bowed, stared regally down at Draco, his face impassive.

"Draco, you have shown yourself to be a fool, who is wholly ignorant of what we expect from our Seneschals. Your behaviour towards those who we consider our friends has been abominable, and it is to

those friends that we expect you to make a sincere apology to, before we can forgive you. Know Draco, that though we will forgive you, should you make these amends, we will not forget, and we will not forgive the same folly a second time. We are most displeased with you Draco and it will be a while before we feel that you can be trusted again. Do you understand?"

Draco nodded twice, noting the presence of the Royal We, which showed just how angry Harry was, and kissed Harry's hand. He then stood up and bowed before Hermione and kissed her hand. He murmured to her, "Madam, even were you not the King's friend my treatment of you has been abysmal. Will you forgive me?"

Hermione, slightly taken aback by the whole event, could only nod silently.

Draco then bowed once again before Harry, and did not rise until Harry had stalked past and out of sight.

It was a dark and stormy night. This was not unusual because it is always a dark and stormy night on the isle of Azkaban, even when it should by rights be the middle of a day. This had something to do with the presence of the Dementors, who seemed to suck the life out of everything in their vicinity. Around Dementors everything seemed to be grey, and Azkaban, the home of the creatures was greyer than anywhere else.

For the prisoners on this wretched isle, it did not matter whether it was night or day, except that it helped mark the passage of time, until their release. Eventually though, everyone lost track of time. It was this on top of the life-sapping nature of the Dementors that often drove prisoners to insanity. How can a person stay sane when they cannot know how long they have been trapped in darkness? Some lasted longer than others. Some lasted for years before losing themselves, whilst others only days. Some lost themselves completely, so that if they were so fortunate as to be released it would only be into another prison; the care of the Healers at Saint Mungo's. Others only lost a small part of themselves; the part that enabled them to smile or laugh; the part that allowed them to touch another human being without flinching; the part that allowed them to put their trust into the compassion of others.



One prisoner, numbered 24601, was held in the deepest, darkest pit of the prison's fortress. There, he had no window to ease his boredom, and none of the saner company that could more often be found in the upper levels. Most of the day he could spend time listening to the screams from the surrounding prisoners, or if he was particularly unfortunate, the ramblings, and giggles of his sadistic cousin, who in a particularly cruel twist of fate was made his nearest neighbour. He considered it good fortune that his cousin was not quite tall enough to see through the grate that was placed high up on the metallic door of his prison. It meant that when he leant out to talk to the prison guards, he did not need to see her mocking face.

The guards were not the cruel brutes that a person could expect from such a surrounding. They were in fact, quite the opposite. It is a curious fact that in the cruellest, darkest places in the world, you can find the most kindness. So it was with Azkaban. Men and Women who thought to give what they could to people who suffered, volunteered to guard the prisoners, when no amount of money could persuade those with less generous dispositions to willingly endure the presence of Dementors. For a few hours a week, the same men and women would leave their comfortable jobs and their happier lives to give what aid and comfort they could to people who might have, with no remorse at all, taken those lives. But these people were not fools, and so though they fed the prisoners, and watched them while they exercised, or did their chores (those who were allowed out of their cells for small periods of time), none of them were tempted to release them. It is perhaps, because of their kindness, that they were able to read more easily the wickedness in their hearts. The most they could feel for such disturbed souls, was pity.

The guard assigned to the lowest pits was no different from the others. Most days he worked as a Herbologist. He had spent time in the Amazon, collecting rare ingredients to study, and hiding large portions of it from the muggles, who would otherwise destroy the precious resources. It was in the Amazon that he had been forced to learn the Patronus, to protect him from the lethifold. When he had returned, he had wanted to do some good for other people, and his skill with the Patronus had convinced him to work on the isle. So every Tuesday and Thursday afternoon he left his research to have his shift on the isle.

It was on one of these shifts (if asked he would say it was a Tuesday) that he began to notice something rather odd about prisoner 24601. For one thing he was always polite, when the guard (called Willis, if you must know), delivered his food or a clean change of clothes, (prisoner 24601 was not allowed out of his cell). For another he displayed absolutely none of the indicators of losing his sanity. He was rather abrupt, that was for sure, and could be quite random in his conversations which he often started up with Willis (and this was another odd thing), but by all accounts he had been like that even before he was sentenced to Azkaban. The prisoner took great pains to keep fit, even in his very confined space, and he seemed to be succeeding.

This was not the oddest thing about the prisoner, because Willis had begun to suspect, as strange as it might seem to be, that prisoner 24601 might just be innocent. This was a disturbing thought, because prisoner 24601 was the most infamous prisoner on the isle and for good reason. Everyone knew that he had committed the crime. He had been caught red handed. Yet Willis could not shake the niggling doubt. He did not dare to confide in anyone. If he did and it got back to the warden then he would not be allowed back on the isle, for fear that he may aid the prisoners in escaping, or worse, they may suspect that the Dementors were beginning to affect his mind! He didn't want anyone to think he was mad. His wife already thought he was a little off for volunteering to spend time on the isle. She just didn't understand that he could do some good.

Because of his doubt, he began to observe the prisoner more closely, and began to volunteer for a few more shifts here and there, offering to take the place if someone couldn't do their hours for whatever reason. It was during an inspection from the Ministry of Magic that he lost all his doubts over the prisoner's innocence.

The inspection had passed as normally as ever. The Minister had arrived, for the yearly inspection, surrounded by guards and the Dementors were ordered well back and away. He had expressed satisfaction with all the volunteers, and with the upkeep of the prison. He had expressed even more satisfaction with the state of the Prisoners. This had never sat well with Willis. Yes the prisoners were debased, but anyone who could look on them as they were and be pleased must surely be as wicked as they were. Willis thought it would be far kinder to kill them than submit them to the years of torture and eventual insanity.

Then they reached the area where prisoner 24601 was held. As the Minister hurried by, eager to escape the mad, cackling taunts of the female cousin, the prisoner noticed that in his hand was a rolled up newspaper. He asked for it, said he missed the crosswords, and the Minister complied. His hand brushed the Minister's hand. The Minister flinched. The prisoner did not.

Instead he calmly unrolled the newspaper. Willis saw it was the Special Edition one. His eyes softened when he saw the front page and he smiled wistfully. It was an expression Willis had seen plenty of times, but not once on any of the High Security Prisoners, or many of the other prisoners.

Then he turned the page. His eyes widened and face whitened with fear. That too was not an expression that he saw on the face of the prisoners. Anger, yes, resignation yes, never fear. Something had disturbed him, terrified him, but the paper was shut before Willis could see what.

The other guards began to tell how prisoner 24601 began to mutter in his sleep, and saw it as a sign of his encroaching insanity. They said that he was losing weight, and quickly. Willis saw but was not so quick to condemn. He had seen something that day of the inspection, and he could not so quickly forget.

It was for that reason, that when the prisoner escaped a month later, he did not do anything to stop him. Instead he issued a silent vow.

Good Luck, Sirius Black, and stay safe!

It was midnight in London, and inside a small house an alarm went off. Slowly, the Aurors occupying the newly converted safe house began to rise from the mattresses they had been resting on in what was once a living room floor but had been converted by the team a week ago.

The team in question was made out of twenty-three men and women hand chosen by the team leader and the Head of Magical Law Enforcement, Madam Bones herself. The reason why they had been so handpicked? Their job was to arrest other Aurors, ones who were known to be corrupt. These chosen few were known to be completely trustworthy.

They quickly dressed in their battle equipment. It was clothing specially designed from a mixture of acromantula silk and dragon hide and was thus very tough, highly impervious to spells, and extremely flexible. It was also spelled so that as soon as they put the clothes on, they became disillusioned. It wasn't as good as an invisibility cloak but it was much more durable and much more affordable, even though the spell had to be woven into it as it was being made because of the impervious nature of the materials.

Then they got to add the toys, things like spell grenades which held anything from light spells to stunners. They each also had headsets so that they could communicate. The headsets were a very new device, made from a variation of the Protean charm. Like most of the Auror equipment, the idea had come from the muggles.

The most impressive item though was the gauntlet. It was designed to be their main secondary weapon and though the gauntlet had been around for centuries, the ones that the Auror's wore were very much new. It was worn on their off hand, over their uniform and extended all the way up, to the elbow. Unlike the rest of the uniform it was made out of steel, which would be rather heavy if they weren't witches and wizards. The reason it was made out of steel was because, unlike acromantula silk and dragon hide, steel could hold magic very well indeed. These gauntlets held two spells; a severing charm, and a shielding charm. It was controlled by the tiniest of hand actions. If the person's fist was clenched then it would be a shielding charm that was used and if open, a severing charm. If worse came to worse and it came to close fighting, the gauntlet itself could be used very effectively for punching and its claw like fingers were sharp enough to stab and slash. It was a very new addition to

their equipment, and they hoped that it would give them an advantage.

One man walked to the side of the room to where a computer was beeping and whirring and making a variety of noises not typical to a computer unless it was malfunctioning. However, the man seemed quite pleased with it as he simply summoned a cup of coffee and began typing away, saying things like, "Vision is clear," "Sound is a bit fuzzy, let me just... ah! Got it!" before jokingly announcing to the waiting team, "It looks like it might begin to rain soon, could be a problem if someone looks outside and sees that the rain keeps missing certain areas."

A slight woman, whose hair was slowly changing from pink to black nodded and said, "We'd better move quickly then. Team One do your job."

The woman, Tonks, was the one in charge of the mission. She was still unsure if that was a wise decision because she wasn't an Auror Captain. But the others were listening to her commands as if she was and that was the most important thing. The last thing she needed was someone being insubordinate and blowing the mission because of it. The team she had was good though. They had experience on their side and knew better than to do that. It also meant she had a lot to prove. The problem with leading a team of experts was that she had to be just as good as every one of them, if not better. Tonks wasn't sure what qualified her to lead them, but she was determined to do her best. It helped that she wasn't too proud to listen to her team when they had some advice to give. Ultimately the decisions were left to her though, and that was a heady thing.

The man leading Team One saluted, and left through the back door. Tonks sat on a chair as the rest of her team either stretched out their tension or started to meditate in an effort to calm the nerves that they all were feeling. Now, they could only wait as Team One disabled any alarms and wards that might otherwise hinder them. The last thing they wanted was to set off a Caterwauling charm as they snuck into the house.

She was nervous. It was her first raid so that was understandable despite the planning. They had been watching the house for a week, watching every coming and going, checking the targets habits and

finally it was time to act. They were sure he was inside, and more importantly they were sure he was alone.

"You alright?" came a voice from behind her, startling her out of her reverie.

It was the same man who had been at the computer, a short man with a weedy face called Cuthbert Berry, but who everyone just called Bertie. He was a technical expert and as such would be coordinating the two teams, once Tonks was out of the safe house. Tonks considered it great fortune that Bones had let her have Bertie for her team. He was a genius with technology and magic; had, in fact managed to make a lot of technology work around high-powered magic, which would give them an indispensable advantage. In fact he was the one who invented the headsets. He was also the one who had come up with the gauntlets and trained the team in its use. He was more importantly, highly experienced. Tonks despite being placed in charge of the mission was still, undeniably not. Bertie's secondary job therefore was to give a bit of guidance and advice. Tonks would have been a fool to not take him up on that.

She shook her head and said in a low voice so as not to worry her team, who were now waiting patiently for the signal, "I keep on thinking it is all going to go wrong."

Bertie put a calming hand on her shoulder, "You'll be fine. The intelligence is good, and I've got my cameras in place. You've planned it well. Just take a breath. First time in charge is always hard."

Tonks nodded.

"Yeah, it is a bit. I don't suppose it gets any easier?"

Bertie laughed a peculiar, nasal laugh and wandered over to his computer.

Moments later there was a slight crackling sound and then the main radio, next to the computer burst into life.

"Team One is in position, Ma'am."

Tonks took a deep breath, checked her equipment one more time and nodded to her team. She lifted the radio up to her mouth.

"Move in."

Harry groaned loudly as the curtains in his room were thrown wide open, allowing in the bright sun through the incredibly large windows. His mouth tasted dry and foul and there was a determined, constant throbbing behind his forehead.

Still, he threw back the covers and trudged slowly over to where a breakfast tray had been kindly placed, although his stomach rebelled at the thought of placing any food at all in his mouth. He did drink the orange juice though; gulping it greedily and feeling the headache subside ever so slightly as he did so. Then he noticed the newspaper and his headache returned completely and actually seemed to have multiplied. The headline and picture on it had been ever so thoughtfully circled...in bright red... very pointedly.

He buried his head in his hands and groaned loudly again.

Harry was not at Hogwarts. In fact he was in Spain; Madrid to be precise. More specifically, at that moment he was in the bedroom of a multi-roomed suite provided for him by the staff of the Palacio Real, one of the largest and most beautifully elaborate palaces in the world.

He had been visiting all over his many domains ever since he became King, yet this was the first time he had been to Spain. He had been received in full kingly dignity, had met various officials both magical and mundane, and had been treated to a great number of spectacles designed to impress him. One of the spectacles was a bull fight in the afternoon. It had been curious for him to witness, and though he had not expected too, he did enjoy it, though he had not enjoyed the sun burn that he had received on his nose. He'd had to put a nasty smelling lotion on it for an hour to completely erase it. That would teach him to not put protection on.

In the evening there had been a fancy reception followed by a magnificent state dinner. During the course of the reception, Harry had been introduced to the British Ministry's Ambassador to Spain's son, and a few of his friends. The group was a couple of years older than Harry, but they were far and away the closest people to his age

present and they had quickly taken him under their wing, as it were. Receptions of this sort are notoriously boring and Harry was pleased to find himself in the company of the cheerful youth, who did their very best to make the evening more lively.

Harry had of course sat separately from them for the meal. Protocol demanded that he sit with the most important people in a place of honour. Most important usually meant old as well, and the conversation was decidedly dull and serious. After the dinner had concluded Harry once again found himself seeking the company of the young group. One thing led to another and before he knew it Harry was sneaking out with them into the never ending nightlife of the place that was Madrid.

Hence the unpleasant wake-up only a couple of short hours after falling asleep and the Headline that screamed in bold print, Rowdy Royal Runs Rampant in Spain!. Beneath that was a picture of Harry exiting a busy nightclub, grinning merrily, with cheeks red and bright eyes. His clothes were dishevelled and he was clearly in the process of stumbling. A guard's steady hand was holding him upright whilst unable to hold back a frown of disapproval.

There was a knock at the door, and Harry lifted his head to reveal bloodshot eyes just as the door opened to admit Arthur Weasley. Unlike Harry (who was still in his dressing gown), Arthur was dressed in his normal working attire, and wearing an expression of disappointment on his face. It was a look Harry had seen shown to Arthur's children plenty of times (Fred and George most of all), but never before had it been shown to him, and Harry who had rather looked up to Mr. Weasley, felt rather small indeed.

Arthur didn't say anything to Harry, and in fact he didn't need to. Harry ran a hand through his hair and said in a quiet voice, "I screwed up, didn't I?"

Arthur moved further into the room and sat in the spare chair on the small breakfast table. Normally he wouldn't sit in the King's presence without permission, but he sensed that Harry at that point needed a father more than a subject, and unfortunately Harry's actual father was in England. This was the reason why Arthur had been nominated to be the Seneschal to speak to him. Lucius had wanted to go in there, wand blazing and knock some sense of decorum into the wayward King. Arthur had counselled against that method, and



the others listened to him. Lucius may have loved his son but he could never be called a 'hands on father'. Arthur on the other hand was the father of the Weasley twins, whose reputations was fast turning legendary. He was deemed the most suitable for the task.

He sighed deeply, "Yes you did."

Harry looked at the picture and the scathing article and said in a choking voice, "I didn't...I mean... I just wanted to have some fun."

Arthur rather than condemning him put a hand on his knee and Harry looked up into his face, which to Harry's surprise was full of compassion.

"I understand," he said, and he did because of course he had done the same things at Harry's age, as did the people who were condemning him so passionately in the papers, (and yes, pretty much all the papers were running the story).

Harry turned his head away, and moved his scrambled eggs around on his plate with a fork. Arthur had noticed that apart from the rearranging the eggs looked untouched.

"I didn't know that I would be seen," said Harry after a long moment of silence.

Arthur didn't point out that Harry would always be seen, and that he didn't have the luxury of assuming otherwise. Instead he simply said, "But you were."

Another long silence and then a whispered, "I'm sorry."

Arthur forewent titles and said, "The damage has already been done, Harry."

Harry's head shot upwards, "Damage?"

Arthur nodded once, "Yes, damage. This article will blow over in a couple of weeks to be sure, but the message it sends will last for a good while longer than that."

"What message is that?" Harry asked, dreading the answer even though he already knew it.

Arthur answered anyway, "Harry, you were caught out drinking in a club on what should have been a diplomatic venture. What is worse is that you are fifteen; old enough to drink in private that is for sure, but definitely underage in a club. If you were anyone else this wouldn't even have raised an eyebrow, but you're not anyone else..."

"I'm the King," he interrupted in a small voice.

"Precisely."

Harry looked over at the article again, and asked, "What do I have to do?"

Arthur felt a welling up of pride. Harry had been foolish that was for sure, but he wasn't shying away from his actions. He was willing to face them head on, instead of hiding his head in the sand. He quickly hid his expression though, not wanting to mess up the message he was trying to send to Harry.

"The palace staff have already released a statement apologising to the public, Your Majesty," The 'Your Majesty' was once again added because Arthur had moved away from parental role and once again into the role of servant. "There have been some calls for you to seek professional help for your 'obvious drinking problem'. At the moment we are ignoring those calls as ridiculous, but if they persist you might need to make a show of doing something, just to appease them. You will have to make a personal apology though, and soon."

Harry stood up, leaving his untouched breakfast (Arthur figured now was not the time to confront him about his eating habits) and called for his dressers to attend him.

Arthur continued, "Your speech writers are already preparing a statement. We can schedule in a press conference for an hour."

"I'll do it." Harry said, steeling himself for the humbling task of making an international apology for being a teenager.

Then Harry looked at Arthur and said, "I won't do anything like this again."

Arthur looked sadly at the normal teenage boy who couldn't afford to act like one and said, "I know you won't, Your Majesty. I know you won't."

With that he bowed and left, the door closing with a gentle click behind him. Harry was left to the mercy of his dressers.

Harry couldn't take it anymore. He'd come back almost directly after the press conference and since it was the weekend he thought that he'd be able to just relax and forget the entirety of the previous evening. He didn't figure into his plans the whispers, giggles and snide comments that followed him everywhere he went. He'd tried going into the Library, but all that happened was that the whispers got quieter, it didn't stop the staring at all, and every so often someone would, safely concealed behind shelves of books offer to fetch him a firewhiskey, that being, apparently the only drink they knew of. He'd also spotted Chris directly opposite from where he'd placed his books. Chris had his own pile of books in front of him, but it was quite obvious he wasn't studying, because when Harry looked over at him he smirked widely before miming taking a swig much to the amusement of his friends.

So Harry left the Library and sort refuge in the Common Room. He'd received it for a while. Justin had been quite sympathetic, and started telling all sorts of anecdotes of influential youth that he knew, being caught after a 'jolly night out.' Cedric had also smiled sympathetically, and had said something about it being unfair that he couldn't act his age without having this sort of uproar. This had all gone to pieces when Zacharias returned from whether he had been lurking. After some less than subtle jabs that had Cedric itching for his wand, and which firmly entrenched Harry's dislike for the youth, he decided he'd had enough.

He snuck out. It had been surprisingly easy. All he'd had to do was go into one of the public bathrooms, disillusion himself (a spell he'd learnt over the summer) and then wait for someone to open the door. His guard had been none the wiser, which didn't say much for the quality of the guard. Harry, having met Moody, knew that he would be furious and after spurting out much about 'Constant Vigilance' would likely, either dismiss the guard or bring him back for some more training. Harry couldn't bring himself to be sorry about that.

Still, Harry knew that it would not take long for the guard to figure out his little trick and then there would be a huge manhunt. Harry had every intention of taking full advantage of his temporary solitude. He needed it and desperately.

This is what brought Harry to the edge of the lake, just within the forbidden forest. The area was a small glade, which was littered with forest debris. The ground was in fact covered with red, brown and gold leaves already fallen from their trees. The top of the trees was so thick with overhanging branches, only a thin shaft of light was able to break through and it struck a young, fallen tree which ran parallel to the lake. He'd gone straight out without bothering to grab a cloak. It was still warm enough that he could do that, but not by much. In fact it was just beginning to get dark, and Harry knew that he would have to go inside then, because without the sun it really would be quite chilled.

He sat on the young, fallen tree and idly began to throw rocks into the lake, watching each rock land with a small plop and cause the water to ripple outwards. He sighed. He was so tired. Everything he did was commented on. He'd never have thought that he would have to apologise for acting his age, but he had. It was humiliating. They treated him like a child but expected him to act like an adult! No one else his age had to read state secrets, and decide on farming taxes, or cauldron bottom thickness regulations. No one else had daily letters from Kings, Queens, Presidents and this Minister or the next inviting him to State dinners, and then risk offending them by not attending. No one else had to deal with protests on Elf Labour, or Goblin rates. He hadn't even taken up his full duties yet! All this and he had to deal with threats to his life, he had absolutely no privacy and he had to attend school. He just needed some time to relax and be himself but that had backfired horribly. Now, he just wanted to vent.

Without even thinking, he'd got up and started pacing angrily in a circle, walking around the small clearing tensely in long, angry strides. He walked round eight times, but on his ninth rotation he became aware of something.

There was a flash on the edge of his vision and then the sound. Oh, such a melodious sound, such a haunting, melodious sound! The pipes, the flutes, the harps, the lyres and the cheerful bells... The song they were singing;

Let the evening dance commence,  
Inside our pretty, forest home,  
Beneath the trees, above the ground,  
Next to lake let's hear our sounds.

But Oh! A guest, a guest is here.

Little boy so brave, and strong,  
Why do you stand so far away?

Come and hear our happy song.

Come, we say you will be gay.

Come and join us, with our play.

He turned to watch them. They clapped, stamping their little feet, running around each other, holding hands, swirling, twisting, up and down, flying, beckoning. He took a step towards them.

Let us dance all night long,

Feast on sweets and fresh fruit juices.

Letting laughter guide our way,

We shall in full be happy and gay.

But why do you stand so far away?

Little boy, come join our fun,

Our fun that never meets an end.

Come and join while night is young.

Come and join our endless fun.

He watched, hypnotised as they swayed in their circle of hands. Their bright colours mingling with each other, their hair flowing behind and up as magic lifted them high. He watched them dance and stamp their feet, wide smiles on their pointed faces, beckoning for him to join. He took another step, and another, edging towards them.

Let us dance forever more,

Never stopping, never bored.

Let us dance till feet fall off,

And breath begins to disappear.

Oh! What laughter, that shall bring.

We're so happy, full of cheer,

Let us call the fairy Queen.

But oh, little boy, you're still so far,

A little closer to come you are.

Come, the music guides your ear.

Come this way, you're almost here.

He reached out a hand, and the creatures reached out their own, ready to pull him into their dance, their eyes wide with anticipation, and their songs reaching new pitches. Their feet stamped in frenzy, their hands clapped a steady heartbeat, and they laughed with high squeals, and he could not look away, wanting so badly to join in – to dance the night away.

A heavy form suddenly knocked into him, breaking his vision and pushing him to the floor, when his hand was mere inches away from the hand of the other. Immediately the creatures vanished and with them the music. All that could be heard was the chill breeze, the gentle lapping of the lake, and the heavy panting of him and his saviour.

Harry lay prone underneath the body for several seconds waiting for the dizziness, which had suddenly hit him with the disappearance of the vision, to subside. The body, rolled off of him, sat up and swore loudly.

"Are you crazy? What did you think you were doing, trying to enter a fairy circle?"

Harry opened his eyes, and looked at the figure who had asked the question in a strong Irish accent. He got a bit of a shock. It was the figure he had seen in the crowds almost two weeks before, the one who had been watching him.

"Who are you?" he blurted out.

The figure gave him a withering look, "Seamus Finnigan, and answer the question."

"I didn't realise it was a fairy circle, what are they anyway? And why have you been watching me?"

Seamus snorted and threw some thyme at him, "It's a good thing I was watching or you'd have been trapped in the realm of the creatures of Morgan Le Fey forever. Rub that all over you, by the way. They're still watching, even though you can't see them anymore. That's good. It should keep them at a distance."

Harry was doing what he was told and vigorously rubbing the thyme all over him as Seamus nodded in approval. Seamus hadn't saved him from such a fate to just cause him harm; however he still wanted to know why Seamus had been watching him. However, Seamus wasn't looking at him. Instead he was walking calmly around the clearing, placing pieces of iron at various points.

Harry watched in curiosity, "what are you doing?"

"The Faye hate iron," he explained without looking around. "It is actually poisonous to them. This should cause them to move on. I'd kill them if I could, but I don't have that power."

He turned half around and grinned at Harry, showing all his teeth.

"How do you know so much about the Faye, anyway?" Harry asked after a long silence, where Seamus decided he had finished laying out bits of iron, and that a branch several feet off the ground looked a good place to sit. Belatedly, Harry realised he was still on the ground and he scrambled to his feet, brushing the leaves off his clothes, but missing the one sticking out from behind his ear. Seamus sat with one leg swinging below him, the other raised to his knee.

"I'm Irish," Seamus said as if it explained it all, which in fact it did, though Harry was still confused.

"Why were you watching me?" Harry asked again.

"Curiosity; I wanted to know what my King was like." He said it with a smirk and a shrug.

Harry knew that what he said was the truth but he guessed that it was not the whole truth. His curiosity grew. Suddenly, they heard noises in the distance. Harry felt his heart sink.

"That would be your guards, I think," said Seamus.

"I guess," was the morose response.

Seamus grinned cheekily, "I guess you better meet them, then."

"Yes."

Harry made to leave but before he could, he heard the Irish voice say, "How is your mother?"

Harry froze, "Why do you ask?" he asked in suspicion.

Seamus grinned lazily and arched his back, stretching out like a cat, before making to leave, "No reason."

He jumped, lightly down from the tree and took ten steps away before turning back. His expression was suddenly serious, "Stay safe, My Liege."

Before Harry could react he was gone.



"Good afternoon, class," Professor Umbridge said as she stood behind her desk. The class, a mixture of Hufflepuff's and Ravenclaw's gave the by now routine response.

"Good afternoon, Professor Umbridge."

The response was the typical mixture of sarcasm and monotone boredom which was usual in a patronised group of teenagers. She smiled as if she had not noticed at all the response and tapped the blackboard behind her, filling it with very familiar writing.

"Recite the course aims please," she began.

The class did so. They sounded vaguely robotic.

"We must understand the principles surrounding defensive magic."

"We must learn to recognise situations where defensive magic can legally be used."

"We must place the use of defensive magic in a context for practical use."

This was the way Umbridge began every lesson. In the first lesson, one clever Ravenclaw (Anthony Goldstein) had put up his hand and asked why there was no mention of using defensive magic in the course aims. Umbridge had looked for a moment like she had swallowed something sour, before she smiled her simpering smile and said that "Of course, we will be using defensive magic, but not until we all have a sound grounding in the theory." She had then instructed them to put their wands away and they spent the rest of the lesson reading the text book. In fact they had spent all of the next lessons doing the same. Well, they were supposed to read the textbook. Harry had spelled some of his own books to look like the textbook and he strongly suspected that the Ravenclaws had done the same. Most of the Hufflepuffs spent the period playing hangman and noughts and crosses. They had in fact started a tournament for it and Ernie was in the lead, although Zacharias was a close second, much to his annoyance. Umbridge it seemed was happy enough to let them do what they wanted as long as they didn't disturb her or ask questions. Considering the class had come to the conclusion that she was absolutely useless as a teacher, they were quite happy

to ignore her and they treated the class as a free period, although a very quiet one.

This lesson was different though because as soon as they had finished reciting the course aims she said in her breathy voice, "Books away, we will be doing some magic today."

There was an excited murmuring in the class and they all immediately complied. When they were done, they were instructed to move to the side of the class and all of the desks were banished to the back of the room. She then clapped her hands together and said, "Today class, we will be doing some duelling. One pair will go up at a time and I will assess your level of skill. Remember, if you know the theory there is absolutely no reason any of you should get hurt at all."

Harry couldn't hold in the snort, first at the idea that Umbridge was capable of assessing anyone's skill in duelling and secondly at the idea that skill in duelling was down to theory alone.

Umbridge heard the snort and zoned in on him with her wide, simpering smile and her greedy eyes. "Thank you for volunteering, Your Majesty. I have heard that you have had quite a bit of duelling training, so this should be easy for you."

Umbridge picked up her class list and it was obvious that she was looking for someone to match him with. She smirked widely. "Su Li, if you will please duel against the King."

Su Li was a very slight, very pretty Chinese girl with a very serious face. She got up smartly and walked into the clear space. Harry followed behind her. They stood some distance away from each other and Su Li bowed smartly, Harry following an instant later, out of respect for an opponent. In the corner of his eye, Harry could see his guard frowning but he did not intervene.

Then Su Li slid into her duelling stance and just from that he knew it would not be an easy match. His blood started to pump excitedly as he slid into his own stance and waited for Umbridge to signal for them to begin.

She counted down from three and they began in earnest. Harry knew instantly that his analysis was right. Su was very fast and she

used her small height to her great advantage, twisting out of the way of spells and always keeping her body to the side to present a small target. Harry was hard pressed to hit her despite his own speedy casting ability. However his own fast speed kept Su on the defensive. She wasn't getting an opportunity to send her own attacks. Harry quickly assessed that if he could keep going he would manage to wear her down.

A slight noise from behind him made him drop to the floor as a spell whizzed over his head. Su Li froze at the dishonourable act and Harry half turned his head. It was Zacharias Smith. Umbridge was standing next to him and had clearly just told him to send the spell. Zacharias sent another one and Harry rolled over and jumped to his feet, even as he sent more.

Umbridge said over the barrage in an entirely too pleased voice, "Keep going. You can hardly expect an even fight in a real duel."

Harry bit back a snarl and started returning fire. Su hesitantly started up again. If that was the way she wanted to play it then he wasn't going to give her the satisfaction of giving up. He redoubled his efforts, although he now had to fight more defensively. Still, he was the better duellist. Hogwarts students just did not have his training. Su was a worthy opponent, but Zacharias barely moved and his aim was appalling.

A simple Stupefy took him out of the running and he turned his attention back to Su. A few minutes later he managed to hit her with an Expelliarmus and she conceded defeat.

Slightly winded, he lowered his wand only to get hit in the back with a spell. He slammed forward and into the wall of the classroom and his wand fell out of his fingers. There was a slight shriek of surprise from the side of the room as he fell to the floor and a shout of "You rotten coward" from Justin, but he quickly sat back up again. Absently he noted that he was bleeding. He looked to where the attack had come from and saw Zacharias standing there, his wand extended out in front of him. He stared, angry at the cowardly attack and angrier because it worked.

There was a moment of silence as he slowly stood up, wincing slightly and then he said, "You were out of the duel. I knocked you unconscious."

Zacharias shifted his eyes to the side, not daring to look into Harry's accusing face.

It was Umbridge who responded, "Thank you Zacharias for aiding me in teaching my point. Ten points to Hufflepuff. Class, dear Zacharias has just demonstrated quite nicely that unconscious does not mean out of the fight. If the person has allies then it is quite easy to revive them. It is far better, to take them out of the equation in a more... permanent manner."

She then turned her attention back to Harry as if she had not just made such an implication. She put on a most fake look of concern and reached out to touch the wound. "Oh dear, Your Majesty. You are bleeding. I suggest that you go to the hospital wing. Next week, we will be back to theory. It is quite clear that your grounding in it is not as sound as you thought."

Harry stepped out of her grip in disgust and shakily headed over to where his guard was standing, glaring at the woman who presumed to call herself a teacher. The guard slid an arm around his waist and they left the room together.

As they were leaving he heard Umbridge congratulating Su and Zacharias on their teamwork and he saw out of the corner of the eye Su flushed with anger. She saw him and flashed him an apologetic smile.

Once out of earshot the guard said in disgust, "I should have her arrested. That was treason."

Harry shook his head and said bitterly, "Yes it was, but we can't prove anything."

The guard scowled, "Why not. We've got a room full of witnesses."

Harry staggered slightly and the guard caught him, "Yes, and they all heard her give a legitimate lesson and my injury is not at all life threatening. We all know that her motive was not so innocent but we can't prove that."

The guard scowled even more as they started on the stairs.

Harry suddenly smiled. It was not a nice smile. "She's not an honourable woman and now I know what she is capable of. We just need to wait for her to cross the line. Once she does that..."

"Once she does that we will be able to get her for that cowardly insult." The guard finished.

"In the meantime I won't make the mistake of letting down my guard in her lessons again."

The guard nodded and silently vowed that neither would he.

It was before dawn when Harry was slowly shaken awake by one of his guards. He blinked away the tiredness before slowly getting out of bed. The room was slightly chilly but he ignored that in favour of scrambling around for his clothes with one eye half-closed. He tripped over a stray sock and stubbed his toe against the edge of the bed.

Immediately wide awake, he swore loudly, "Oh, bugger," and let out a hiss of pain.

"Harry?" came a sleepy question from the nearest bed.

Harry looked guiltily at his friend, "Sorry Justin. Go back to sleep, alright."

Justin though, sat up in his bed and began rubbing the sleep out of his eyes, "Is everything fine? Why are you up so early?"

There was a groan from the other side of the room and Ernie said in a voice half muffled by the pillow his face was buried in, "Nothing is the matter. It is September 23rd."

"What happens on..."

He didn't get to finish because Zacharias, having woken up by all the not so quiet talking, said in a peeved tone, "It's the Equinox and be quiet. Some of us are trying to sleep."

Justin opened his mouth to argue but Wayne said from where he too had awoken, "We'll explain in the morning. I would also like to get some sleep."

"Alright then, sorry," he said but Wayne had already gone back to sleep, his soft snores clearly audible.

Harry meanwhile had finished dressing in his warm clothes and he made his way out of the doors.

He and his guard walked in silence through the quiet castle. It was strange to walk through when even the paintings were asleep and it was cold, but they made their way through it and out into the grounds which were fresh with morning dew.

At the gates of the castle they were met by three girls, dressed in robes of pure white, one of which was Luna Lovegood. On Luna's right there was a girl who could only be described as striking, with grey eyes, pale skin, the blackest of hair, and lips which seemed fixed in the barest of smirks. Harry recognised her as a Slytherin in his year but he had never spoken to her. On Luna's left was a slightly younger girl who was clearly the Slytherin's sister. She was quite the opposite in colouring but she had the same angular face.

All three bowed as one and then the Slytherin took a step forward and said to the guard, "Your services will no longer be required."

The guard took a step backwards and bowed to Harry. Another guard would be waiting by the gates for when they returned.

Harry turned to the Slytherin. "Your name is Daphne isn't it?" he asked.

Her smile turned genuine, "Yes, Magic's chosen King. Daphne Greengrass. This is my sister, Astoria Greengrass."

"We will escort you to the site and aid you in your preparations there, as will the other virgin priestesses."

Without warning, she and the others had taken his arm and a portkey and with a hook around the navel they were gone from Hogwarts.

They landed in a field next to an elaborate tent. Daphne immediately stepped inside as did Astoria but Harry lingered for a second with Luna.

"I thought all the priestesses were Virgins?" he muttered to her.

She smiled unblinkingly at him. "Silly, Harry. If all the priestesses were virgins than how would their lines continue? It is merely the five youngest who are over the age of thirteen and can participate in the rituals who must remain untouched."

Then she led him into the tent. If the outside was elaborate, the inside was more so. It seemed as if he had entered an ancient temple. Everywhere was made out of white marble and from the walls hung plants of holly, rosemary and thyme. In the centre of the room was a huge tub, also made of marble and by it were two girls of the same age as the other three and also dressed in white, pouring buckets of steaming water into the tub. The steam did not hang in the air, but quickly dissipated as if by a wind although the air was quite still. Floating in the tub was rose petals and it was that scent which filled the room, giving the entire atmosphere a sense of purity.

When Harry entered the two girls paused momentarily in their chores and approached Harry where they bowed. Daphne quickly introduced them. One was so fair that she was almost white, and she was called Astrid Sunhild. The other was the opposite in every way and she was called, Manadis Rowan.

Whilst they were making the introductions, Astoria and Daphne were pulling over a clothing screen to place in front of the bath.

"Your Majesty, Astrid and Manadis will attend you as you purify yourself for the ritual."

Harry nodded, somewhat relieved that the priestesses had enough sense to realise that he would be uncomfortable with his classmates attending him whilst he was in a bath. He understood the necessity of having the priestesses' aid, having had the entire ritual explained to him in full, but it didn't make him happy about it.

Harry stepped behind the screen and hurriedly undressed, stepping into the tub as quickly as possible, and doing his best to make sure as much of him was covered as possible. There was a very conveniently placed cluster of rose petals in the water which made him somewhat more at ease.

Astrid and Manadis immediately stepped forward. Astrid placed her hand on Harry's hair and started muttering spells and blessings and Harry felt more of his tension leaving him. Manadis was dipping her hand into the water and placing little droplets in specific areas; his forehead, his heart, and his wand hand. Every time she placed a droplet she made a prayer to magic asking magic to purify the soul and body of her chosen. By the time both of them were done, Harry felt entirely relaxed and at ease.

Once his soul was pure, he had to wash away the impurities of the flesh. Astrid washed his back and hair whilst Manadis took to scrubbing at his hands and feet. Harry did everything else, too embarrassed to let them do what he could do himself. After an entire bucket of hot water was upended over him, he was made to stand and he was robed in a robe of pure white.

Then the screen was removed and what the other three had been doing was clear because on a low table (which had not been there before) was a series of low candles, that let off a slight scent and a pot of Kohl, oil and a round ivory stick. Luna was also placing a pot of henna paint.

Harry was bid to sit, and he sat cross legged on the floor next to the table. He was told to shut his eyes, and whilst Daphne and Astoria applied Henna runes to his hand, Astrid and Manadis continued to make blessings and Luna painted his eyes, she also explained several things.

"We take aspects of several cultures during the equinox ceremony to remind us and magic that whilst we are in England we are still blessing the entirety of the magical world. The kohl is blessed to give you clear sightedness both literally and metaphorically. The rune in your right hand means sacrifice. The ritual originally used the King's blood. We use something else now."

Harry could almost hear the smile in her voice as she said that. He also wondered why she made much more sense than normal.

"The rune on your left hand symbolises fertility and life. It is what we wish for most at this time of the year, when summer is at an end and the harvest is upon us. Do not open your eyes."



Harry could hear her moving away, but she came back seconds later and began dabbing his wrists above the henna with oil. "Frankincense and Myrrh." She said no more, but also dabbed his forehead and she opened his robe enough so that she could dab his heart.

Then they were done and he stood and Luna knelt before him and placed sandals on his feet.

Then they made their way outside. By now the sun had begun to rise, although the sky could still mostly be described as gray. A low mist, which was so particular to that area of England, hung on the ground, but the way was lit by a series of lamps.

Daphne and Astoria moved to stand either side of him, and Astrid and Manadis stood just behind them in an honour guard. Luna moved to stand just in front of Harry to lead the way.

They walked for some time and soon the great shape of their destination began to emerge through the mist. Harry had a sudden thought.

"Luna, how do we hide this Ritual from the muggles?"

Luna smiled, "There is an illusion a short distance away of Stonehenge, and wards over this area. Just for the day, they believe that illusion to be the real thing."

Harry nodded and they continued on their trek in silence. Harry was beginning to get cold because his feet were bare and he was only wearing a thin white robe. He couldn't say anything though.

Eventually they reached the great stones, and waiting for them was sixteen women ranging in age, dressed in white, and standing in an incomplete circle and behind each woman was a torch. As they approached Luna whispered, "Twenty-one people, seven times three, and one for the focus."

One of the women broke away from the circle and approached the virgin priestesses. The virgin priestesses all knelt on the ground and murmured, "High Priestess."

The High Priestess touched each one on the head in blessing and then said, "Rise daughter of Lovegood. Rise daughters of Greengrass. Rise daughter of Rowan. Rise daughter of Sunhild."

Then she knelt before saying, "Welcome, Magic's chosen King."

Harry, knowing what to do placed his hand on her head and murmured his own blessing before instructing her to rise.

Then he was led into the centre of the circle and the others closed it, the High Priestess was placed directly opposite him and she began the ceremony.

It began with her asking Harry for his blessing for the daughters of the twenty-one priestesses, which he gave most solemnly. Then she asked him to bless the autumn which he did.

After that the two Greengrass sisters stepped forward and two others, one who was fair and the other who was dark also stepped forward and they circled Harry in a wide circle, chanting in a foreign tongue and dancing alternately wildly and solemnly and the flames behind their places in the circle flickered.

Out of the ground, next to Harry a tree began to grow. It sprung up from nowhere but it grew so tall and sprouted apples, which another two girls of opposite sort, came and picked and placed in a basket, and they walked around the circle and offered an apple for everyone to eat, and offered one lastly to Harry, and he picked it up with his left hand, the hand which held the rune for fertility and life. He held it up to the sky, touched it to the earth and the others mimicked his actions. Then they ate the apples, including the core.

When they were finished the High Priestess approached carrying a large bowl filled with hot drink and made of white maple. She held it up to the sky and said "Wassail" and then brought it to her lips and drank deeply. She then presented the bowl to Harry who took it, held it to the sky and said, "Wassail." He too drank from it. It was then passed around so that every woman could toast and say Wassail. Once it was finished they danced around in a circle, singing, laughing and blessing the tree, because whilst it was a ceremony it was also a celebration.

Then there came a break in the dancing and two more priestess brought two live goats into the circle and presented him with a knife made of silver to kill them as a sacrifice. Harry took the knife in his right hand, where the rune for sacrifice was and he placed his left hand on the goats head. He then quickly and painlessly killed the goat, allowing the blood to wash onto the apple tree. The other goat he let wander free.

The dead goat was then taken and cooked on the fires around the circle, and each ate a piece at least.

Then they danced some more and sung some more. They spent all day, singing and dancing, feasting and drinking and being merry. They celebrated autumn in ritual celebration and in joy. They were solemn and wild, chaotic and controlled, light and dark.

Yet when midnight came and they at last dispersed there was nothing in the clearing to suggest that they had ever been there at all.

For the second time that month, Harry was woken before dawn. Unlike the previous time he was not expecting it. One look at his guard and he was asking the question, "What has happened?"

The pale faced guard simply said, "You must come with me immediately, Your Majesty."

Harry noticed that the guard had his wand out and he kept on scanning the room for threats. Harry jumped out of bed, and reached for his clothes.

"No time, Your Majesty," the man said, seizing Harry by the arm and dragging him out of the room. The complete invasion of Harry's personal space had Harry quick to follow almost as much as the tone of the man's voice.

They walked swiftly though the stone corridors, Harry struggling to keep up with the man's booted strides. His own bare feet were chilled, and would probably blister on the hard stone, with the fast pace. On every corridor there was an armed presence. They all saluted when Harry passed, but their eyes never stopped searching and in the pale light from the torches that lined the halls, they had a grim countenance.

Then they reached the set of rooms which had been set aside for Harry's use. There was a much higher presence of men here, and one man stood directly in front of the portrait but hurriedly stepped aside when Harry approached. He was practically shoved inside.

Already present was Chris, looking pale and shaky and Glory, wearing a pinched expression on her face. More telling was the presence of Moody, who was pacing across the room with a clunk, clunk, clunk of his wooden leg. He took one look at Harry's shivering form and conjured up a dressing gown and slippers, which Harry gratefully put on.

"There isn't any use with His Majesty catching his death from the cold anymore than if he gets attacked," Moody said reprovingly to the guard.

The guard shifted and looked as if he would like to argue but bit his tongue. Moody nodded approvingly.

"What is going on? Why did you get us out of bed?" Glory asked. She attempted to ask the question condescendingly but it came out frightened. Chris and Harry looked to Moody, also wanting the answer to the question.

Moody sighed and his eye which had been glancing all around, swivelled to land on them. He said as gently as he could manage, "Sirius Black has escaped from Azkaban."

Glory gave a little squeak and Chris sat down heavily. Harry felt his own blood rush away. "What! When?"

He couldn't think. Sirius Black, who had betrayed Peter Pettigrew to Voldemort, where he was tortured until he gave away the Potters' whereabouts. Sirius Black, who had then killed Pettigrew in his own home when Voldemort had not returned from the attack. Sirius Black, who had been caught in the house, laughing as he held in his hands the bloody, stump of a finger that was all that remained of Pettigrew,. Sirius Black, who should have been his godfather.

"It was last night. We don't know how. All we know is that he is coming here. He was heard repeatedly saying, "He is at Hogwarts." He's after you all."

Harry sat down in one of the chairs and pulled the dressing gown tighter around him. He was shivering and not just from the cold.

"What's going to happen?" Chris asked.

"There will be a few changes for you all. There will be a greater guard presence. There will be no more sneaking away from the guards by any of you!"

He shot glares at Chris and Harry. Harry looked sharply at Chris. He raised an eyebrow questioningly. Chris shrugged with one shoulder and smiled in a self-deprecating way. Harry returned the smile. It was one of those rare moments when the two boys were in complete agreement with each other.

Moody had not missed the exchange, "I am not joking. It was bad enough you risking yourselves when there was not so much of an obvious threat. You must be more vigilant. He is after one of you!"

Chris put on his most charming smile. It was one he had lots of practice with and Harry had always been quite jealous of. The most charming that Harry could manage was a lop-sided grin. Moody was not placated by the smile and gave another glare for good measure before continuing on with the new rules.

"Your Majesty will have to move in here to sleep. We can protect you better here than in the dorms, and you sleeping in there puts the other children at risk."

Harry nodded, having expected it, but not able to hide the swell of disappointment. He had liked living in the dorms. He had just begun to fit in with them.

Then Moody hesitated before saying slowly and angrily, "There is one more measure that you should be aware of. The Minister, in his infinite wisdom has asked me to request permission from Your Majesty, for the Dementors to leave their post to search for Black. Since we know he is coming here, the Minister further requests that the Dementors be placed around the school as protection."

"What!" three voices asked at once.

"Is the Minister crazy?" Harry asked.

Moody sighed ruefully, "No. He's not. His reasoning actually makes sense. The Dementors can sense Black. They know his mind and will know when he is about. They are also angry. They don't like that he escaped from them."

"And it won't exactly matter if they attack us, like they did Harry. We don't need such little things like a soul," Chris said sarcastically.

"They won't get the chance!" Moody snarled. "They would not be allowed to enter the grounds at all, and I will switch the guards so there is always someone who can perform a powerful patronus with you at all times."

Harry thought for a minute about the request. "What do you suggest?" he eventually asked.

Moody stamped his wooden leg angrily before letting out a sigh, "Truthfully, I don't know. The Dementors would be useful in catching Black, but I don't like the risk to you or the other students. Dementors are dangerous."

"But you say they will be helpful." Harry persisted.

Glory looked incredulously at Harry, "You're not seriously considering the request, Harry? They almost ate your soul in the summer and they make everyone so miserable."

"I know!" Harry snapped, before continuing more softly, "I know. I know what the risks are, but I also know what Black can do."

The three gave a shudder at the thought of Black in the castle.

"Given the choice of Black or Dementors, I'll take my chances with the Dementors."

There was a long time of silence before Glory whispered, "So that is it then?"

"Yes, Your Highness. That is it."

Harry stood up and walked to the window, noting that the sun was just beginning to rise. He faced his brother and sister. "There's no point going back to sleep. We'll just have to get up for class soon. We'll sit together today, present a united front and put on a brave face. We won't let them see our fear. Remember we are Royalty."

Chris stood up and looked Harry in the eye. "More than that, we are Potters," he said.

Harry smiled, and for the first time in a long time he was proud of that fact.

Since it was only a couple of hours before he would have had to get up anyway, Harry decided not to go to bed again. His mind was far too active and in any case, he normally found it difficult to go back to sleep once he was awake. Glory and Chris clearly felt the same way, as they went into their rooms to get changed and then went into the common area and got out a chess set. From their moves, Harry could tell their heart wasn't in it. Their lacklustre commands caused their pieces to slump and move reluctantly to their opponents, dejectedly and morose.

Harry meanwhile ordered his own things to be collected, and then went into the room he was sharing with Chris to organise it and settle in; the meaningless chore effectively distracting his mind until it came time to go to breakfast.

Before leaving his room, he checked his hair, straightened his tie and made sure he looked as regal as possible. Chris and Glory did the same before together they stepped into the corridors. They were largely empty. They had timed leaving their rooms so that they would enter the hall when it was already mostly full, so only a few stragglers were hurrying to breakfast. All these stragglers stopped to gawk and whisper when they caught sight of the three Potters. They had rarely been seen together within Hogwarts and together, Harry had to admit, they did cut an imposing sight, especially with their respective guards walking behind them.

They reached the Great Hall as one, and the noisy clatter dimmed to nothing before erupting once more. The morning post had yet to arrive.

Harry split up from Glory and Chris with a nod of his head and walked over to the Hufflepuff table, where his friends hurriedly made room for him.

Justin passed him some breakfast, and Harry forced himself to eat for the sake of appearances, though it sat like lead in his stomach. Hannah Abbot exchanged a glance with Megan Jones. Hannah was easily the most motherly one of the group, and she noticed his mood.

"Is something wrong, Harry," she said with a worried look on her face, "When Wayne said you were not in your room this morning..." she trailed off.



Harry pushed his plate of food away, and reached for his juice. There was no use forcing himself to eat. He'd likely enough just make himself sick.

He opened his mouth slowly then paused before continuing on. It hadn't escaped his notice that people were leaning in eagerly to hear and he wasn't sure he was comfortable with that. There was no use hiding the matter though. Everything would be in the paper.

"Sirius Black," he began and Zacharias Smith looked up with a keen expression on his face, "Has escaped from Azkaban."

There was a lull in the conversation at just that moment and his voice rang across the hall. Several people screamed and Sally-Anne Perks let out a little 'meep'. Several others whitened and the hall erupted into noise and panic. Harry winced.

He looked up at Dumbledore who looked at him with an expression of profound disappointment. Harry couldn't blame him. That was not well handled. It suddenly occurred to him, that Dumbledore had probably been planning an announcement in order to prevent this sort of reaction.

Dumbledore stood up and raised his wand into the sky, shooting off several loud bangs, and sparks. The hall quietened and he cleared his throat, and looked over his half-moon spectacles at them all.

"That wasn't quite the way I intended for you to be told, but what His Majesty has said is correct. Sirius Black has escaped."

A buzz of noise broke out across the hall, and Harry squirmed in his seat as several students stared unabashedly at him. Dumbledore raised his hand and at once there was quiet again.

"I must assure you that you are all perfectly safe within these walls," he said, looking down his crooked nose at the students. "However," and at this he turned very stern and imposing and Harry was reminded why Dumbledore was considered one of the most powerful Wizards in the world, "There are a few new rules that you will have to abide by, for your own safety and for the safety of your fellow students."

"Members of the Royal Guard will be patrolling the corridors and grounds. You are not to disturb them, or interfere with their business, but if they ask you anything you will cooperate with them. In addition to this, Dementors will be stationed at every entrance and exit to Hogwarts..."

Harry noted that Dumbledore did not look particularly pleased about that. He couldn't really blame him either. Dementors could tinge the atmosphere with grief and melancholy even from a distance, and being at every gate, they would effectively be surrounded. Harry imagined it wouldn't be long before morale began to plummet. Sirius Black was worse though. Much worse.

"And while they are with us, I must make it plain that nobody is to leave school without permission. Dementors cannot be fooled by tricks or disguises. It is not in their nature to understand pleading or excuses, and I cannot stress enough that they are dangerous. Therefore, I ask each of you, not to give them any reason to harm you."

A few students were looking pale, so Dumbledore smiled benignly at them and added, "However, several of the guards and teachers are capable of creating the Patronus charm, which is able to repel the Dementors. If any of you would like instruction in how to create this complex, and difficult piece of magic, then Professor Snape has graciously agreed to teach it to any who ask."

Professor Snape glared darkly down at the students, as if daring any of them to approach him. Harry was grateful that he was already having lessons, and he almost had a Corporeal Patronus. It was something with four legs and could only be described as huge.

Then Dumbledore clapped his hands and beamed down at the students, "On a lighter note, with the Triwizard tournament now only a month away, the selection process for those wanting to be part of an academic team is complete, and you can find out if you have been chosen on the notice board in the main hall, or alternatively in your respective common rooms. I have also been asked to inform you that the Quidditch tryouts for the School Team will be held on Saturday and will be conducted by Madam Hooch. The Captain will be chosen after the tryouts. Anyone who wishes to attend the tryouts should let Madam Hooch know before Saturday. The tryouts are

open to anyone from second year and upwards. If enough first years show interest, a junior Quidditch competition will be made for you."

Excited whispers broke out at this and Harry could see that in the face of Quidditch, Sirius Black was almost forgotten. 'Well played,' Harry thought; filled with admiration for the masterful way that Dumbledore had diffused the situation he unwittingly created. If nothing else, Harry could learn a lot about crowd control from the man.

"Well, I think that is all the news I have for you this morning, and I think the professors want to begin their lessons. Off you trot. Chop, chop."

Harry got up with the rest of the students and began heading towards the door but as he reached it he caught sight of a flash of dark hair in the crowds. He quickly said goodbye to Wayne who had been next to him, promising to catch up and started making his way towards the girl, who had stopped just outside the notice board.

"Su," he shouted, and she looked up, confusion briefly painted on her face, before it was replaced with her usual cool mask. She quickly spotted him, and made her way over and gave a small bow.

"Your Majesty?" she bowed in question.

Harry's smile froze and suddenly he was uncertain over what he wanted to say. Why did she have to call him that? It made it all so awkward. Absently, he noted people looking at them, and he said softly, "Can I speak in private with you for a minute?"

She shifted uncomfortably, "Now? I'm kind of late for my..."

"It will only take a minute," Harry said, and with a sigh she relented and Harry led her over to a small alcove, and his guard stood watch so no one would be able to spy.

Once there, he became all tongue tied, and they stood in silence for several moments, before Su prompted, "What did you want to say to me, Your Majesty?"

"Will you go out with me," he blurted out, and Su froze with her hand mid- placing a bit of hair behind her ear. Whatever she had expected him to say, it certainly wasn't that.

"Excuse me," she asked.

Harry took a deep breath and said it again.

"Why?" she asked, looking genuinely confused, and utterly unable to hide it.

Because you're quite pretty, and you're honourable, and you fight really, really well, Harry thought to himself. Of course he couldn't say all that, because it would be really embarrassing and he was also aware that they were not very good reasons, especially not compared to the main one which was, "I like you. At least I think I do, and I want to get to know you a bit, to make sure."

Su stared at him for a moment and her mask slipped over her face and Harry braced himself for the cruel and humiliating rejection which was about to follow when she said...

"Alright."

Alright? Did she just say? He looked at her, and saw that there was a faint twitch at the corner of her mouth. Oh!

"That's good then," he breathed.

The twitch at her lips developed into a full blown smile and her eyes shone with mirth.

"How about Sunday?" she asked, and Harry did a quick mental check to see if he was free, before deciding, to hell with it, he'd make sure he was.

They quickly arranged times to meet and then the bell rang signifying that class was about to start. Without warning Su stood on her tiptoes, and pecked him on the cheek, before sauntering off to class.

His guard had to prompt Harry to send him on his way.

When mixing Blood from the Hungarian Horntail with extract of Whomping Willow, it is important to remember to use a neutralising agent as both are highly volatile ingredients. Blood in potions should always be handled carefully because of its highly magical nature and depending on how it was gathered it can have very different reactions in its use. For this reason, willingly given blood is always the safer blood to use but even this has its dangers. A good case study to look at is that of Mrs. Fosters who in the year 1645...

Harry clenched his fist tightly around his quill and tried to recall the case study of Mrs. Fosters for his extra essay, which Snape had assigned him. He thought it was mighty unfair that he had been given the assignment. After all, it wasn't his fault the cauldron had exploded. He was working with Hannah Abbot who was almost as bad at potions as Neville Longbottom. Still, whether it was fair or not, he wasn't going to not do the assignment. Snape didn't like him as it was and there was no need to give him an excuse to hand out a detention.

Still, doing the assignment was proving impossible with his brother making that racket in the background.

He squeezed his eyes and took a deep breath. He put the quill to parchment when there was an exclamation of "Goal! Yes!"

Harry jumped and made a line of ink right across half the essay. He swore.

"Damn it, Chris! Will you be quiet I am trying to do this essay."

Chris looked up from where his head had been buried in Which Broomstick? A sports magazine that included recordings of one of the matches that had taken place that past weekend so that those people who could not get tickets could still see the games. Harry did not care one bit about what match he was watching. What he wanted was for Chris to shut up so he could do his assignment.

Chris frowned and tapped the magazine with his wand to stop the recording.

"I'm trying to watch this match. Go and do the essay in your office. That is what it is there for."

He tapped the magazine, re-starting the match. Harry stood up, went over to the magazine and tapped it with his own wand, stopping it.

"I can't," he said through ground teeth. "I have put that office at the Egyptian Minister of Trade's use as he goes over the regulation that the British Ministry has drawn up which might allow flying carpets to be sold in this country."

Chris snorted, "Who would want a flying carpet anyway. Broomsticks are so much better. Anyway, if you wanted to do an essay you shouldn't have given up that room. I want to watch this match."

He tapped the magazine. Harry tapped it. The figures in the magazine were frozen in a comical position.

"Families find it more convenient to use than broomsticks and they are more comfortable over long distances. If you want to watch the match, why don't you go do it in the Gryffindor Common Room? I'm sure there are loads of people interested in watching it with you."

"This was my room first and I don't want to go. Why don't you go and do it in the Hufflepuff Common Room? Why should I have to leave?"

He tapped the magazine and it started again.

Harry said loudly, "Because you wouldn't even have this room if I wasn't King and I need to stick around in case the Minister finishes."

Instead of tapping it again he snatched the magazine off the bed. Chris immediately lunged for it but Harry held it behind his back out of reach, so Chris knocked Harry to the floor. What followed were a few minutes of mad wrestling, which ended when the door was opened by one of the Guards. At that precise moment in time, Harry was sitting on top of Chris, whilst Chris had one hand on Harry's chest, whilst the other half in his mouth, trying to push Harry away. The magazine lay forgotten several feet away.

The guard cleared his throat and Harry jumped off of Chris, straightening his robe and blushing terribly. What he must be thinking?

"The Minister has said that he will probably be some time going over the agreements and that he begs Your Majesty's leave to continue to use your office," the Guard said with suppressed mirth.

Harry nodded his head absently, and continued to straighten his robe. How had he got ink on it? Oh right, he'd knocked his pot off his desk in the fight.

Chris spoke up interrupting, "I think I'm going to head to the Common Room to watch the rest of this."

Then, swiftly he picked up the magazine and hurried out of the room. Harry stared after him. Why was he so eager to leave when a minute ago they'd been fighting over just that? Then Harry spotted the state of the room. The cheeky bugger! He'd left the mess for him to clear up.

Harry looked over at the Guard who was still waiting for a response. Well if there was an advantage to being King...

"I'm going to go to the library. Tell the Minister that when he is finished he can call on me there," he said as regally as he could.

The guard to his credit didn't say anything but simply bowed and without another word Harry grabbed his essay and strolled out of the room.

When Harry entered the library, it didn't take long for him to spot a table, with a familiar head of bushy hair behind a mountain of books. Wondering what his curious friend was studying this time he headed over.

"Hi Hermione," he said, dropping down into the seat next to her. She jumped.

"Oh! I didn't see you there."

Harry smirked. Of course she didn't. There was a book. Harry just didn't rate in comparison. Harry looked at the titles of the books and his eyebrows rose.

"What are all these for?"

Hermione had already gone back to her book and was chewing her bottom lip in agitation. She jolted again.

"This is for the Transfiguration team. I've had this idea for a while and even without making the team..." Harry couldn't resist a snort at the very idea that Hermione Granger would fail to make it onto an academic team. "...I would have tried to find time to develop it. Now I have an excuse and the others on the team seem ever so eager. If we can make this work, it will wipe the floor with the other schools."

She beamed at him.

Harry stared back bemused, "Yes, but what is the idea?"

She looked taken aback.

"It's the Animagus transformation of course."

Harry stared for a moment before saying slowly, "Hermione, the Animagus transformation already exists."

She waved her hand negligently.

"I know that," she said. "This isn't about making the Animagus transformation this is about making it more accessible to the everyday witch or wizard."

Harry translated that from Hermione speech. The Animagus transformation is very hard. She was trying to make it easier.

"Everyone knows it's such a complex and difficult piece of magic and so few are ever able to make the transformation. I've checked the register, there have only been seven Animagus this century..."

"That have been registered," Harry interrupted. He knew for a fact that there were several that were unregistered.

Hermione conceded the point but then continued, "Still, in proportion to the number of wizards, there should be far more walking about but there aren't. I've checked my facts. Every witch and wizard has an inner animal but so few are able to make the transformation. It's illogical."



"It's because everyone is going about the transformation the wrong way," a new voice piped up, and this time it was Harry's turn to jump. Without either of them noticing Luna had plopped down in the seat next to them.

Hermione was also surprised, "Hello Luna. What did you just say?"

"I said, wizards and witches are going about it the wrong way. They treat it like it is a transfiguration when really it isn't like a transfiguration at all.

"How can it not be like a transfiguration, your changing one thing into another?" Hermione said incredulously.

Instead of answering her Luna turned to Harry and said to him, "Tell me, what is the hardest thing about doing an animate to animate transfiguration?"

Harry thought for a second before saying tentatively, "Convincing the animal that it is the new animal, especially when the new animal goes against its natural instincts."

"Exactly," she beamed.

Harry stared in confusion. Evidently Hermione felt the same way as she exclaimed, "But that doesn't make any sense."

Luna got out a sugar quill and started nibbling it. Then she placed it behind her ear, "Doesn't it? Even in the most basic of transfigurations you have to convince something that it is something else. Matchstick to needle? You have to convince the matchstick that it is a needle. Ball to feather? You have to convince the ball that it doesn't have to fall, but instead it can float if it wants to, changing the essential quality of the item, if you want to go all Aristotelian on me. Inanimate to animate, you have to convince it that it is alive. Animate to inanimate, that it isn't. Even conjured items have to be convinced that they actually exist, otherwise they would fade. But Animagus! What essential quality are you changing?"

Harry was still confused but Hermione had the light of understanding in her eyes, "You're not changing anything. The Animagus is a representative of yourself at your most basic nature. In fact the most dangerous part of the Animagus transformation is not the

transformation itself, but getting stuck, because the animal is so much a part of you, and even the most powerful transfigurations fade with time." Then she blinked and the light was gone. "But it can't be as easy as that!"

"Can't it?" Luna grinned, and with a pop, where once sat a blonde haired girl, now sat a beaver. She tilted her head to the side and stared at them with the most curious expression on her face. Hermione and Harry stared back, gobsmacked.

"Impossible," Hermione breathed, but after a moment of staring she turned back to her notes, muttering under her breath.

The beaver scrunched up her face and gave a little wiggle and with another pop, Luna was returned. She beamed at Harry, who still hadn't got over his shock.

"Do you like my form?" she said, and Harry choked.

"Yes, I... I..." Don't say anything bad! He searched for something to say, "Have you got it registered?"

She nodded her head and retrieved her sugar quill and bag, "Yes, in Switzerland." Before Harry could say anything she exclaimed, "I'm going Snorkack hunting now."

With a blink of an eye, she was gone.

Harry was sitting in his office when two owls swept into the room. He recognised them both instantly as Krum's Striped Owl, Gestreift – Yes he was that unoriginal – and Fleur's stocky Tawny, Autour. Fleur loved her little owl, considering it the cutest thing ever. Harry just thought it was a menace, which considering it knocked over his paperwork as it landed, and then had the nerve to stare cockily up at him, was probably a fair assessment.

Harry looked at his paperwork, now scattered on the floor, and thought that it had taken hours - when he should have been doing his potions – to sort. He'd have to give it up as a lost job.

He looked at the two owls. From experience, he knew that if he ignored Autour, he would likely peck where as Gestreift was

normally quite stoic and well behaved. He glared at Autour as he took Fleur's letter.

He read it, blinked, and read it again.

My Dear Harry, it began.

I hope that this letter finds you in good health, though I am sure that I would hear if that were not so, as not a day goes by when you are not in the papers for some reason or other.

Harry knew that this was true, much to his continued displeasure.

It is such a shame that the same could not be said for me. Harry, my heart is broken in two. Krum, that deceitful, backstabbing, little...

And there the word was crossed out, which meant, Harry knew, that Fleur had written something terribly rude which her upbringing would not allow.

I shall not go there, as it is beneath my dignity to comment on such a dog. But I will relate what I know to be true. He has cheated on me and so we have broken up. I hope never to speak to him again, and I know that I will have your support in this.

Then several lines were crossed out, signifying that Fleur was quite agitated, otherwise she would never have sent the letter with mistakes.

I don't know how long it will be before I recover from such disappointment and heartache, but it is a dear comfort to me to know that I have your friendship. It lightens my heart when I realise that in less than a month, I will see you again and then perhaps I will re-find happiness. Until then though, I will have to hope that I can overcome my own misery and melancholy.

Your dear and faithful friend,

Fleur Delacour.

For a moment Harry was overcome with rage on behalf of his friend. How dare Krum cheat on her! How dare he hurt her! He had half a

mind to destroy the letter without reading it. He was glad that he didn't as the letter read.

Harry,

By now I am sure that you have received a letter from Fleur. Do not listen to it! We have broken up, but I did not, nor have I ever cheated on her. She saw a picture of me with my Coach's daughter and assumed the worst, and stubborn as she is, she just won't listen! She's let her damned Veela jealousy get the better of her.

As it is though, I'm glad I learnt about this side of her before we got any more deeply involved. Even if she listened to me now, I wouldn't date her again. I couldn't date a person who doesn't trust me and unfortunately her Veela half will never allow her to trust me, not when I am so successful.

For your sake, I hope to patch up the damage before we come to Hogwarts, but knowing Fleur I do not have that much hope. That girl can hold a grudge.

I'm sorry you're stuck in the middle,

Krum.

Harry felt his rage ebb away and then groaned. Great! He'd missed his best friends and now they weren't talking to each other. When they got to Hogwarts, unless by some miracle Krum did manage to appease Fleur, they'd be unbearable.

What was he going to do now?

The Carriage and Thestral Inn was as busy as it always was on a Friday evening. People had finished their working week, and so flocked to the pub for a pint or two before heading home to their families for the weekend. The low lit lamps, beamed ceiling, and smoky atmosphere were the perfect ending for a hard week of work.

"Wahay!" came a shout from a group of red-robed Aurors sitting in a corner booth as the door swung open, admitting a pink haired Tonks.

Tonks smiled and waved at them, stopping at the bar to get her own pint before heading over.

"Is it not the lady of the hour? Ay Captain," said Aaron Baines, a young man who wasn't on her team, but whom Tonks thought would be a worthy addition.

Tonks blushed right through to her roots and tips at her new promotion, given to her just that afternoon after work. She was the youngest Captain since the war, and she was rightly proud.

Tonks quickly settled into the hub and flow as drink after drink was offered to her. Unfortunately Tonks had to decline as she would be heading another mission the next day and she wouldn't do that with a hangover. She wanted to live up to her new title.

Aaron seemed to notice as he frowned at her and said, "You're not drinking much. Shouldn't you be celebrating?"

Tonks shrugged, "I'm apparating, and anyway I have work tomorrow." There was no harm in saying that.

"Fair enough, what is it that you are doing anyway?"

Tonks was about to answer when a purple-robed Royal Guard came over, his own pint in his hand.

"Hi, Tonks, I hear congratulations are in order?"

Tonks beamed at him, "Thanks, Owen. It was a bit of a shock. What are you doing here though? Shouldn't you be on guard duty right about now?"

He sat down next to her, "No, I have the weekend off, family thing. I'm quite glad, working in a school full of children is hard, not that I don't love being back at Hogwarts."

Tonks smiled and Aaron butted into the conversation, "How is His Majesty anyway."

Owen took a gulp of his drink and slammed it back on the table, "No idea. I rarely see him. I'm assigned to the Princess."

Tonks thought that was a bit odd. So did Aaron it seemed as he prodded, "But surely they are together quite a bit? They are siblings."

"Well, I've seen more of him in the past week, now that he is sharing a room with his brother, but between you and me..." he paused, looked furtively around the room, leant in close and whispered. The other two leaned in close to hear, "Between you and me, I don't think the siblings get along that well."

Tonks frowned but it was Aaron who put into words her thoughts, "You think there is something fishy going on in the royal pond?"

"No, I mean, I don't know. At times they seem perfectly normal, but others..." he said thoughtfully. Then he shook his head, "Their family isn't a normal family, but I haven't seen anything to be concerned about. At least I don't think I have."

Tonks breathed a sigh of relief. Of course, it wasn't in her jurisdiction to worry about the King's home life, but she was relieved nonetheless.

"If you do see something to worry about, you'll report it straight away to Moody, right?" she couldn't help but ask.

Owen took a long pull of his drink, "Tonks, if I see something to worry about. I won't need to say anything to Moody."

This, Tonks reflected, was probably the truest statement out there.

It was Saturday and Harry was on his way down to the Quidditch pitch with what seemed like half the school. Harry sincerely hoped that most of them were there to watch or else it would take until tomorrow as well, and then Harry would miss his date with Su.

"Your Majesty!" a voice shouted behind him and Harry paused and turned to look and saw Ron Weasley limping towards him, a bright smile on his face.

"Hi, Ron," said Harry.

"Hello, great morning for Quidditch isn't it."

"You're not going to compete are you?" Harry asked, looking incredulously at his cane.

"Nah," Ron waved him off, "I can ride a broom, but my leg stops me from playing at anything near competitive level. It can't handle the strain and it can't pull off several manoeuvres."

Then his tone went all wistful and he got this far off expression on his face, "It's ironic though. When I was younger I had this dream. I saw it in a mirror and everything..."

At Harry's confused look he said, "I'll explain that later, it is a long story. But, I had this dream. I was going to be Quidditch Captain for Gryffindor and Headboy. It would have been brilliant. I would have beaten all my brothers who came before me. It was shallow and an awful dream, I know, but I wanted it so badly. It would never have happened, I know now, not with Chris around to be Prefect, but I always had the Quidditch dream, because I was good, Harry. Maybe not to professional level, but I was good. But then, there was the whole thing with the stone..."

He trailed off and there was silence for several seconds before he shook his head and smiled broadly, "But you know what, I wouldn't have changed the past for all the world. I'm far more famous then I would ever have been as a mere Quidditch Captain."

Harry nodded mutely, but he could see that there was something dark hidden behind his eyes and that Ron was not anywhere near as happy as he was pretending to be. It occurred to Harry that for all that Ron was the Hero of Hogwarts, he had lost something when it happened and it wasn't something that he could ever get back.

Ron carried on as if nothing was the matter and Harry, out of kindness, allowed him the illusion, "Anyway, I take it you're going to the tryouts as well. Are you watching?"

"No, I make a fair seeker, so I figured I would try to get it."

"I don't see your broom anywhere?" Ron questioned.

"Yeah, well, I figured I could borrow one of the school brooms. I don't actually have my own broom as Beauxbatons required us all to

use school brooms so nobody would have an unfair advantage," Harry explained.

Ron froze where they were walking, "Your Majesty is planning to use one of the school brooms?"

"Yes," Harry said slowly.

Ron gulped, "Have you seen the school brooms?"

Now Harry was getting a sinking feeling in his stomach. "No, why?"

Ron let out a chuckle and said, "Because the school brooms are only fit to be used as firewood. I swear that there is an old Moontrimmer in there and I know for a fact that there is a Silver Arrow."

Now it was Harry's turn to freeze, "Do you know how much those brooms are worth?" he gasped.

"An awful lot, I'd imagine, but it doesn't change the fact that they are not fit to be flown."

That brought the point home and Harry groaned, "I don't have anything to fly though."

If he'd known, he could have ordered a broom. There was no doubt that he'd have been able to get one in just a week. Heck, the company would probably have given him a broom for free, just for the advertising perks. 'The broom of Kings' and all that.

"Is there anyone you can borrow a broom from?" Ron asked.

At just that moment Harry spotted Cedric coming up the stairs from the Hufflepuff Common Room and hailed him over. Cedric came over with a wide grin on his face.

"What can I do for you?" he asked.

"Cedric," Harry began desperately, "Are you planning on trying out for the Quidditch team?" he said spotting the broom swung over Cedric's shoulder.



Cedric noted what he was looking at and said, "Oh, no. I'm hoping to be the Triwizard Champion and I wouldn't have time for that and Quidditch. I've offered to help out Hooch with the selection process though. Why?"

Harry explained the situation and Cedric frowned, "Well, I guess you can borrow my broom for the tryouts, Your Majesty. It's a Cleansweep 7, not the best broom around but serviceable enough. I can use one of the school brooms. It's not like I need a good broom to observe."

Harry thanked him profusely and Cedric waved it away, "It's no problem. Regardless of the fact that it is my duty to serve you, I would likely enough have done it for anyone in that situation."

"I am grateful though."

"Yeah, well as grateful as you might be, if we don't hurry, even with a broom you won't make the team as we will miss the tryouts."

Realising the truth of this, Harry, Ron and Cedric, hurried down to the Quidditch pitch.

Harry's hope was unfounded as it quickly became apparent that most of the people were there to compete. Thankfully the huge numbers were whittled down very quickly by some basic flying tests. Harry couldn't help but be bemused. Why were some of those people even attempting to join the team? Some of them couldn't even stay on a broom, whilst others were in danger of knocking both themselves and others out of the sky. However, once they'd all been eliminated and sent into the stands to watch, the numbers were much more manageable and the real tryouts could begin.

They were split according to the positions they were applying for and Harry was pleased to see Chris going off with the other Keepers. Harry knew that he was an excellent flyer. He competed against Krum after all, and Krum was known to be world class. He also knew though that Chris was probably just as good and that whilst Harry might have a slight advantage in speed due to body weight, Chris would make it more than a challenge. As it was though, Chris obviously recognised that he would make a better Keeper than Seeker.

There were fifteen students applying to be Seeker including a pretty Chinese girl who Harry knew was dating Cedric and Draco Malfoy. Draco smirked at Harry from atop his polished Nimbus 2001, as it hovered gently over the ground.

"I hope that Your Majesty is up to the challenge. I am after all the best seeker in the school."

In answer Harry swung over the broom and kicked off into the air, leaving a trail of dust in his wake, pushing the old Cleansweep to the limits of its speed and agility. He looked behind him and saw Draco staring open jawed at him. Noticing Harry looking at him, he shut it with a clack. Harry couldn't resist the taunting jibe, "I think I can manage."

After that they had to catch a series of apples thrown at increasing further distances away from them and the fifteen was cut to ten. Then the ten had to complete an obstacle course which was designed to force the flyer to perform various Seeker techniques, as well as steep dives and climbs and the ten was cut to five, amongst them Cho, the pretty Chinese girl, Draco, Harry, Ginny Weasley, and surprisingly Colin Creevey. Although it was clear that Colin was not up to the standard of the other four.

For the remaining five, two snitches were released. It was a tense competition but at last Harry prevailed catching the first snitch, followed shortly by Draco with the second. Harry now knew that Draco hadn't been mindlessly boasting. He was talented, although Harry suspected that he was still the better flyer.

By this point all the other selection processes were almost complete. They had enough players to make two complete teams, and whatever happened whoever did not make the final team would be on the reserve. Each player would be observed on their own merit and not on whether they were on the winning team or not.

It was time for the highlight of the tryouts and what most people had been looking forward to. A quidditch match. On one team there was Harry, Draco's goons as Harry liked to call Crabbe and Goyle, Cormac McLaggen, Demelza Robins, Alicia Spinnet, and surprisingly Zacharias Smith. Cormac was made temporary captain of the team, by virtue of the fact that he asked and nobody else cared much to argue.

The other team included Chris, the infamous Weasley twins, Angelina Johnson, Katie Bell, Montague ("I don't have a first name, and if anyone says otherwise they are lying, got it!") and Draco. Surprisingly enough, no Ravenclaws made the team and only two Hufflepuffs, which really emphasised the Slytherin and Gryffindor monopoly on quidditch players.

The two temporary Captains were made to shake hands – Angelina for the other team, although she and Montague had almost come to blows over it, and it was only the fact that the Weasley twins backed up Angelina which made a difference – and then they were off.

For the first few minutes the game went brilliantly, especially since at some point Luna had got hold of a microphone and she was cheerfully and obliviously commenting on the game. Then without warning a bludger came hurtling towards him and then another in a Doplebeater Defence. Harry executed a perfect Sloth Grip Roll and righted himself just as the whistle blew indicating a foul. Harry flew over to where Cormac was as did the others in slight confusion. Why had a time out been called so soon?

"What do you two think you are doing out there?" Cormac screamed at Crabbe and Goyle. They looked at each other in confusion.

"Because of your inattention, His Majesty was almost hit by a bludger. Do you want that on your conscience?"

Harry thought that was a bit unfair. After all, Fred and George were excellent beaters and Harry expected to be hit by a bludger every now and again. He opened his mouth to protest, "Cormac, its fine. Crabbe, Goyle, you two are doing a brilliant job. Don't worry about it. It's not your fault. The Doplebeater Defence is notoriously difficult to counter and it is the Twins signature move."

"With all due respect, Your Majesty," Cormac sneered and Harry started to really dislike him. "Your safety is paramount, and it is the responsibility of the Beaters to make sure you remain safe. What the Weasleys were thinking sending such an attack against you, I do not know, but I intend to have words with them."

Before Harry could stop him he was off flying towards the twins. Harry got a sinking feeling in his stomach when he noticed that they were also being yelled at, by Angelina, Montague, and Draco.

He quickly flew over just in time to hear Angelina say, "You are not to target His Majesty. I can't believe you two, knowingly endangering his life!"

The twins stared sullenly at the others in silence and Harry snapped, "I knowingly endanger myself. This is a game people, and I expect to be treated like every other participant!"

"But, Your Majesty!" Draco protested, and Harry silenced him with a glare before flying away, hoping that was the end of it. He was beginning to think that he ought to have tried out in disguise.

The game quickly resumed but Harry quickly realised that it was not the end of it. No bludger went anywhere near him and several times Harry sped off to intercept some Chasers only for them to not counter his move at all. It came to a head when Harry sped towards the ground at top speed, chasing the snitch, with Draco just behind him. Unfortunately for him Demelza accidentally got in the way and he had to pull to a sudden stop. Draco instantly stopped as well.

Harry'd had enough.

He flew to the ground in a rage and landed, dismounting his broom. A hush flew over the stadium. Draco realising his mistake quickly flew after him as did the rest of the teams.

"Your Majesty, wait!" he shouted as Harry walked to the stadium exit.

He stilled and turned around, his back rigid and his face cold. "You threw the game."

Draco stared at the ground, "I know and I'm..."

"Do you think that I am such a sad human being that I can't handle losing? Do you think so little of me? I do not need to be coddled, Draco Malfoy."

"We were just trying to protect you," said Katie Bell.

"I do not need to be protected by you, Miss Bell. I intended to compete, but the only people who have acted like they have the same intention are Fred and George and my brother, and my brother doesn't exactly have much interaction with me in the game. Since you all have no intention of playing properly with me around, I see no recourse but for me to leave."

They all started protesting and then another figure landed near them and Cedric was standing at Harry's back. "There is no need for that, Your Majesty. I think that they have learnt their lesson and will now play properly."

Draco began to protest but Cedric issued him a stern glare. Harry thought that the glare on what was usually a smiling face was quite effective.

They all agreed and Harry felt his anger ebb away and remounted his broom.

The second half of the game was much more enjoyable. Chris's team quickly took the lead as it became clear that whilst Alicia was brilliant and Demelza was fantastic at dodging bludgers, overall the stronger chaser side was with Angelina and Katie, with Montague almost acting like a human bludger. Fred and George were prodigious beaters and it was apparent that even if Chris was not an excellent Keeper, he would have been better than Cormac. Cormac seemed more intent in watching the game and telling his team what to do, than actually guarding the goals. It was apparent that if Harry wanted his team to win, he would have to catch the snitch.

Unfortunately for him Draco had taken up the strategy of guarding his tail. With his superior broom, if Harry wanted any chance of winning he would have to shake him loose somehow.

Suddenly, Harry angled his broom to an almost vertical position, and got an intense look of concentration on his face and he sped off towards the ground. Draco followed behind him, his head dodging left and right, looking for a sign of what Harry spotted. At the last possible second, Draco pulled neck and neck with Harry. Harry instantly pulled up. Draco's eyes widened as he realised his error, right before he slammed into the ground.

Meanwhile Harry had spotted the snitch and shot off in its direction. Draco, remounting his broom had no way of catching up with him.

The snitch was hovering just next to his brother's shoulder, and Harry reached out a hand to grab it. At just that moment something hard and solid, slammed into the back of him knocking him off his broom and into his brother. They both span wildly towards the ground, but thankfully were not that high up. Still, Harry landed hard on his left arm and with a stabbing pain, felt it crunch beneath him. Someone screamed as Harry slowly sat up, looking at the bloody mess that was his arm. A meter away Chris was on his knees, spitting blood and broken tooth out of his mouth.

As several people came running towards them, Harry felt something cold and round, wiggling in his sleeve. He reached inside and grabbed it and stared as shock began to set in.

He'd performed the Plumpton Pass.

Sunday came quickly and to Harry's good fortune he had no problem greeting it as Madam Pomfrey was a superb healer. That hadn't stopped her from ranting about the dangers of quidditch and the teenagers who insisted in taking part in such dangerous activities. Harry let her rant as she did such a fine job of fixing him up and he was prepared to put up with a lot for talent. She was even able to regrow Chris's teeth and that was not something that the average healer could do.

Harry spent some time deciding what to wear for his date before Chris decided that since Harry was being such a girl, he would get Glory to help him do his hair and nails. Glory had in fact been quite eager to do his hair, claiming that it was an embarrassment and that he should at least try and do something with it. He didn't have to let the Potter hair win. Harry put his foot down though and Glory had left in a huff, saying that he'd regret it when Su dumped him for his hair. Harry rather thought that Su was not that shallow and if she was, then he was better off without her.

Then he went down to the entrance hall where he had agreed to meet her. She was already waiting and together they went into Hogsmeade.

The date actually started quite well. They found it easy to get along with each other. Su had a rather dry and sarcastic sense of humour once she felt comfortable enough to use it and Harry had a way of setting her at ease. She was also a keen duellist and the two chatted happily about various matches and competitors as they went from store to store. Su's favourite competitor was the Wizard, Amias Assumptio. Harry thought his name sounded rather like a spell. Su agreed and then proceeded to explain that his name actually was a spell. She then proceeded to explain the grand history of the spell and the numerous incidents people had got into when saying his name with a wand in hand until he'd changed his name to Ajax. Harry then recognised the duellers name and agreed that Ajax was very good.

It had all gone to pot when someone had recognised Harry, so that when they emerged from Honeydukes it was to a flash of photography in their faces and a slew of questions from eager reporters. Before Harry could react Su grabbed him, pushed him behind her and shoved him back into the shop.

Harry righted himself and straightened his robe, impressed with her quick reaction time, and slightly embarrassed by it as well. He should have protected her!

Su must have interpreted his look because she smiled slightly and flicked her hair over her shoulder, and explained. "My Father is a muggle and a professional bodyguard. I am his only child and so he trained me to follow in his footsteps. That didn't change just because I have magic." Then she looked a bit unsure and added, "That doesn't bother you, does it?"

"No, of course not," he quickly assured her, even though it had slightly bothered him, although he was sure he'd get over that.

After that they decided to continue their date somewhere else. Harry was allowed to go anywhere because of his position and they figured that since Su was with him, the same could be said for her. If not, Harry promised that he would take the blame. The store owner graciously allowed them to use his backroom, and from there they flooded to Diagon Alley and before anyone realised who was amongst them, they headed into muggle London.

The date resumed with them going to a restaurant and then spending the afternoon shopping, although neither of them felt the urge to buy much. They were walking back towards Diagon Alley when Su spotted something.

"That looks fun!" she exclaimed, "Let's go in there."

She was pointing at a rather large building which had in bright, yellow writing on the roof, the words exclaiming Tricks and Acrobatics and then underneath on a window it had, Circus Activities for all Ages and Levels. Inquire inside for details on parties and events!

They headed inside and found out that it wasn't just for parties and that they had space for the two of them to take go in if they wished and he passed them the health and safety forms to sign. Harry quickly looked at his watch.

"We have time to go in for an hour, I think."

"That will be brilliant. Let's do it!"

There were all sorts of activities inside. There was juggling, stilts and Diablo's for the older children and for the younger a small play area with pictures of clowns to colour in, and face painting so they could become clowns themselves, or lions so they could pretend to do lion taming. There were trampolines, trapezes, and various other gymnastic equipments, and hanging above it all was a tightrope.

Su immediately headed over to the trampoline, but after spending a bit of time with her, Harry was drawn to the tightrope, much to his guard's (who was disguised as a chaperone) unease. He was quickly harnessed up and given a safety talk and then he began.

It was hard going. Harry could feel the rope shaking with every step and he had to hold his arms out on either side to keep from toppling and even with the harness he felt a strong thrill. He had a feeling he was doing rather well as he had seen others try and they had barely made it a few steps, although he figured that might have something to do with him having stood on a broomstick whilst it was flying at top speed before.



He had just made it half way, when by chance he looked across at Su right when she was attempting to juggle some balls. She tossed three balls in the air, and all three of them she missed and they landed comically, one after the other on her face.

Harry couldn't help it. He laughed, and in doing so, he lost his footing and began to fall. The harness caught him with a jolt. Then suddenly, there was a tearing sound and the harness snapped. He fell. Harry saw the ground rushing up to meet him. Someone screamed. He shut his eyes.

Then nothing happened. He slowly opened his eyes, and saw that he was hovering, several meters above the ground. He looked at his guard in confusion, but noted that his hand was still reaching for his wand. Only a second had passed since his descent began. The guard was staring at his chest. Harry looked down and saw Luna's necklace, the one she had given him on the train.

It was glowing.

They had to get the obliviators in unfortunately, as they couldn't explain away floating in mid-air. Because of this, it was quite late when they got back to Hogwarts and Harry knew, just knew that the whole incident would be in the next day's paper. He resolved to seek Luna out and thank her before then.

Harry walked Su to her Common Room, and the two stood in silence for a moment before Harry said, "Well, that was fun."

"It certainly was interesting," Su agreed.

A moment passed and then the two burst out laughing.

"I'm sorry, this isn't working is it?" Harry asked whilst wiping away a tear.

"No it isn't." Su laughed herself.

After they composed themselves Su explained to Harry, "Actually, I didn't think we would be suited for each other, but you're a nice guy and I figured it couldn't hurt."

"Yeah, well you were right on the money, with that prediction," Harry snorted.

"I did have fun," she said earnestly.

Harry snorted again, "At which point, when the press was there or when the obliviators were?"

"Like I said, that just made it interesting."

"Well, I've been on worst dates."

Su looked curiously at him and Harry kept his mouth shut. No way was he going to be talking about that event. No way.

"Now, I am curious."

"Tough."

"We're friends aren't we?"

Harry looked at her and said, "Yes, we are Su. Yes we are."

Final end of chapter AN: In this chapter, Luna mentions registering an animagus form in an other country. I know I have seen this idea before, but for the life of me, I can't remember where. If anyone knows, please tell me so I can credit it. Unless it is a pretty common idea, in which case I've fallen into another cliché and it doesn't matter. Cheers. Cap ;)

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